

**SPECIAL
FEATURE**

**THE
BEST 50 PRODUCTS
OF 2015**

stereophile

ONLINE AUTHORITY:
WWW.STEREOPHILE.COM



**JADIS ORCHESTRA
REFERENCE MK.II
INTEGRATED
AMPLIFIER » P.105**

YG'S CARMEL LOUDSPEAKER

SOPHISTICATED STYLE,
SUPERB SOUND

IN REVIEW

**SUPER SPEAKER
VALUE: GOLDENEAR'S
TRITON FIVE TOWER**

**GREAT-SOUNDING
PERSONAL MUSIC FROM
AUDEZE, AUDIOQUEST, QUESTYLE**

**HI-TECH VS. TUBE TECH:
INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS
FROM JADIS & MARK LEVINSON**

**THE RETURN OF THE CLASSIC
DECCA PHONO CARTRIDGE**

**JOANNA
NEWSOM:
WILD
AT HARP!**



**(AUDEZE EL-8 OPEN-BACK & AUDIOQUEST
NIGHTHAWK SEMI-OPEN-BACK HEADPHONES » P.43**

DECEMBER
2015

TEN
THE
ENTHUSIAST
NETWORK

DEVIALET

INGÉNIERIE ACOUSTIQUE DE FRANCE



Analog Digital Hybrid
The best of both worlds:
pure analog sound, smart
digital power.



Speaker Active Matching
Adapts the signal to the
characteristics of your
speaker model. Your
speakers are transfigured.



Record Active Matching
Adapts the phono stage
to the characteristics of
your turntable and of the
record playing. Sets a
new standard for the vinyl
experience.



Magic Wire
Innovative digital to analog
conversion architecture.
Best in class performances.

THE ULTIMATE AUDIOPHILE SYSTEM

EXPERT

AUDIOPHILE EVOLUTIVE SYSTEM

AS WE SEE IT

BY ROBERT SCHRYER

THIS ISSUE: Neil Young gets it. And he gets it for the same reason we became audiophiles.

We Don't Get No Respect

It never fails. Browse *Stereophile's* Facebook page, scroll through the comments to an article that refers to life as an audiophile, and *splat*—appearing like bird droppings on your glistening screen are anti-audiophile wisecracks pointing out exactly how far off the “normal” track our hobby has derailed. Occasionally, I catch myself in mid-sentence, already replying to one of these droppings, the gist of my intended message invariably being: “If you’re an anti-audiophile, what are you doing using up what life you have left reading a webpage devoted to a hobby you don’t get? Shouldn’t you be hanging out with your own friends?”

Maybe it’s just me, but I’ve been getting the sense lately that anti-audiophile sentiment is more bitterly hostile than it once was. I vividly recall it consisting, for the longest time, of a general apathy, and whiny exasperation from whomever I’d politely plead with to listen to how great my system sounded. (And it did—I swear!) Obviously, the Internet is a bonanza for those who want to target us, but forget about the quantity of the criticism; what’s with the *tone*? Are non-audiophiles really that fed up with the audiophile lifestyle?

It sure seemed that way when Neil Young’s PonoPlayer hit the market. The blogosphere’s backlash was spontaneous: a unanimous gag reflex. Most notable about it was not what a mob of non-audiophiles actually said in disparagement of the Pono or Neil Young, but what *wasn’t* said and was clearly readable between the lines. Take a step back, re-read the nastier comments, and a picture emerges: The anti-Pono backlash was about more than taking down an oddly shaped portable player: It was a payback-style assault on the audiophile *identity*. That the ambush was the PonoPlayer was happenstance; it could have been any audio device with perceived audiophile pretensions that dared to pass itself off as a product for the masses. “Better sound”? “The way music is supposed to be heard”? The *nerve*!

The episode set my thoughts on two tangents: first, about how the Internet is a bottomless well for spawning irritating people; and second, about how our hobby always gets slammed for the same four infractions:

“THE AUDIOPHILE HOBBY IS AN ARROGANT ENDEAVOR EXERCISED BY ARROGANT PEOPLE.” If we can all agree that obnoxious bozos roam both sides of the audiophile/non-audiophile divide, I concede that our hobby is populated by more than its share of them, while noting this happier turn of events: Life on our side has gotten a lot less obnoxious since there’s been a lot less of: a) the patriarchal schools of thought that decreed what one had to like, follow, or believe in order to be taken seriously as an audiophile; and b) some of the old-guard bricks-and-mortar audiophile boutiques, whose smug and patronizing sales “help” so often made my presence feel as desired as a gassy bellyache, and left me feeling inadequate, bothersome, and reluctant to ever return to a hi-fi store, even one with a good reputation. I say to such establishments, “Good riddance: Serves you right for *not serving right*.”

“YOU GUYS WITH YOUR SILLY TWEAKS THAT MAKE NO SCIENTIFIC/ENGINEERING SENSE!” My audiophile cred be damned, I can’t tell you how often I thought a tweak was doing more for the sound of my system than was the case—which I’d realize sometime later, after I’d removed it. Nonetheless, there is a well-grounded rationale for using tweaks: some of them can mitigate distortions that would otherwise contaminate the musical signal. On the less-grounded side, remember when tweaks, by and large, were both cheap fun and had a plausible-sounding logic behind their workings? Boy, I miss those days. The market is now glutted with tweaks silly and specious, many of them priced as high as sophisticated electronic components.

“YOU GUYS CARE MORE ABOUT SOUND AND GEAR THAN MUSIC.” No doubt some of us mostly do, just as most of us *occasionally* do—such as when we’re itching for a new component. But this sort of thing can be said of any hobby that, by its very nature, requires the flame of obsession to keep it going. That flame doesn’t devalue that hobby’s *central* purpose, which in our case is to use really cool audio gear to turn recordings into living, breathing performances that have the power to steal us away from the present.

“THE COST OF HIGH-END AUDIO EQUIPMENT IS THROUGH THE ROOF!” This is the part of the audiophile belly that attracts the most slings and arrows, and it’s easy to see why: The biggest target is the easiest to hit. Prices for competing megabuck audio products are rising at a clip dizzying enough to spin the head of even the staunchest apologist for high-ticket gear. Assuming that the skyrocketing prices are commensurate with advances in parts and technology, is audio equipment *really* sounding that much better that much faster? And at what point do increases in audible returns diminish to the point where they’re simply not worth the increases in price?

My take: Seeing the prices of audio equipment rise in thousand-buck bounds does not ring true with the hobby I fell in love with 30 years ago. What does ring true is the dichotomy that can be found at the other end of the price spectrum: the insuppressible proliferation of audio gear that keeps sounding better at prices more of us can afford. It’s *those* products that are our hobby’s best chance of growing in popularity.

At the 2015 Consumer Electronics Show, Neil Young made a point of saying that the PonoPlayer was not an “audiophile” product, but one geared to the general music-loving population. Anyone aware of Young’s abiding aversion to both lossy digital compression and artists “selling out” knows he wasn’t just paying lip service to sell more Ponos. Young still believes what he’s been saying all along: Listeners should be able to hear their recordings the way the artists, producers, and engineers intended. ■

Robert Schryer (Sletters@src.com) believes that the perfect sound system exists only in heaven, but he’s in no rush to hear it. He lives in Montreal.

Music is the space between the notes.

Claude Debussy



Audition the astonishing $>128\text{dB}$ signal to noise ratio SAE 2HP (2 Horsepower) amplifier at your nearest SAE dealer to experience the silence between notes.



www.hear-sae.com



FEATURES

53 The Products of 2015

Stereophile's reviewers vote for the best audio components of the past year.

73 Kingdom of the Harp

She's the brainiac goddess of the indie-rock harp and now Joanna Newsom is back after five years with a new record, *Divers*. By Robert Baird.

EQUIPMENT REPORTS

82 YG Acoustics Carmel 2 loudspeaker

by John Atkinson

93 GoldenEar Technology Triton Five loudspeaker

by Herb Reichert

105 Jadis Orchestra Reference Mk.II integrated amplifier

by Art Dudley

119 Mark Levinson No.585 integrated amplifier

by Larry Greenhill

135 Questyle Audio QP1R portable hi-rez audio player

by John Atkinson

FOLLOW-UP

101 DeVore Fidelity Orangutan O/93 loudspeaker

by Herb Reichert

143 Aurender Flow D/A headphone amplifier

by John Atkinson

143 Astell&Kern AK100 portable media player

by John Atkinson

145 CAT SL-1 Renaissance Black Path Edition preamplifier

by Robert Deutsch

149 PTP Solid 12 turntable

by Art Dudley

173 Pono Music PonoPlayer

by John Atkinson

SEE OUR EXCLUSIVE EQUIPMENT REPORT ARCHIVE AT WWW.STEREOPHILE.COM

Stereophile (USPS #734-970 ISSN: 0585-2544) Vol.38 No.12, December 2015, Issue Number 431. Copyright © 2015 by TEN: The Enthusiast Network Magazines, LLC. All rights reserved. Published monthly by TEN: The Enthusiast Network, LLC., 261 Madison Ave., 6th Floor, New York, NY 10016-2303. Periodicals Postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. Subscription rates for one year (12 issues) U.S., APO, FPO, and U.S. Possessions \$19.94, Canada \$31.94, Foreign orders add \$24 (including surface mail postage). Payment in advance, U.S. funds only. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS. (See DMM 707.4.12.5); NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY Facilities: send address corrections to Stereophile, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Mailing Lists: From time to time we make our subscriber list available to companies that sell goods and services by mail that we believe would be of interest to our readers. If you would rather not receive such mailings, please send your current mailing label, or an exact copy, to: Stereophile, Mail Preference Service, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Subscription Service: Should you wish to change your address, or order new subscriptions, you can do so by writing to the same address. Printed in the USA.



No matter what you listen to inside the entirely new Lincoln MKX, the one thing you won't hear is compromise.

We could have simply put speakers where everyone else does, rather than using Point Source Architecture to give you optimal dispersion and consistent sound quality throughout the cabin. We could have reserved the extraordinary dynamic range of the 20-channel, hybrid amplifier for your home theater instead of a luxury vehicle. We could have used standard grilles rather than precision-milled, aluminum ones that were tested and retested to achieve the perfect balance of style and transparency. We could have taken the easy road. Instead, Lincoln embarked on an exclusive collaboration with Revel® to create the Revel Ultima™ System*—so you could enjoy an immersive, mirror-to-mirror musical image while you're out on the highway. Lincoln.com/RevelAudio



**THE LINCOLN
MOTOR COMPANY**

*Available feature. Revel is a trademark of HARMAN International Industries, Incorporated. All rights reserved.
Pictured here: Lincoln Black Label MKX Thoroughbred. Available at participating Lincoln Black Label dealerships only.

NEW O & X UPGRADES and MORE!

Audience announces NEW optional product upgrades to its full line of power conditioners:

O – New high grade **DHNO (OCC) 6 Nines AC power wire** has been developed especially for internal wiring of power conditioners throughout the entire active circuit. This feature represents one of the biggest advancements to the performance of Audience power conditioners providing a much higher degree of transparency, tonal richness, and a more pristine sound stage to audio reproduction.

X – **Rhodium plated copper duplexes** are now available for higher conductivity further improving every aspect of sound quality particularly noticeable in terms of speed, clarity and sound staging.

And MORE – All new Audience power conditioners are now made with **gold over copper forks** used to connect the filter capacitors to each outlet replacing tin over copper forks. This new standard feature adds a noticeable degree of refinement to the sound for a smoother yet more detailed presentation with improved timbre.



"Across the entire line the build-quality is nothing short of exemplary."
the absolute sound - 2014 Editors' Choice Award



audience

Every great performance deserves an audience.

Visit us at CES '16, room 30-318 Venetian Hotel.

audience-av.com

(760) 471-0202

(800) 565-4390

DECEMBER 2015 stereophile

Vol.38 No.12



p.145



p.27



p.19



p.43



p.19



p.19



p.159

COLUMNS

3 As We See It

"Neil Young gets it," says Robert Schryer. And he gets it for the same reason we all became audiophiles.

13 Letters

Readers ask if high-end audio prices have gotten out of control, ponder on why we listen to music at all, and complain about a "Recommended Component" no longer being available.

Get on your Soapbox! Visit the forums at www.stereophile.com.

19 Industry Update

High-end audio news, including the shows and dealer-sponsored events taking place in December 2015 and January 2016, plus a report from the UK's Whittlebury Hall show and new products from dCS, Entotem, and Linn.

Want to know more? Go to the "News Desk" at www.stereophile.com for up-to-the-minute info.

27 Analog Corner

Michael Fremer clears up some loose ends with products from TARA Labs, Synergistic, and Stillpoints.

35 Listening

Art Dudley takes the Decca-derived, positive-scanning London Maroon cartridge for a spin.

43 Gramophone Dreams

Herb Reichert listens to high-end headphones from AudioQuest and Audeze.

159 Record Reviews

For December's "Recording of the Month," we've chosen Joanna Newsom's *Divers*. In Classical this month we have a review of the latest Bruckner Symphony 9 completion. In Rock/Pop we have new recordings by Billy Gibbons and the BFG's and Promised Land Sound. In Jazz, new recordings by Karrin Allyson, Michael Cain and Noah Preminger get a critical listen.

172 Manufacturers' Comments

Audeze, Convergent Audio Technology, GoldenEar, London, Mark Levinson, and Parasound comment on our coverage of their products.

178 Aural Robert

Could there someday be a proper Faces live record? Drummer Kenney Jones talks to Robert Baird about the band's newly remastered and re-released catalog and the how every stadium was once a party.

INFORMATION

176 Audio Mart

174 Manufacturers' Showcase

174 Dealers' Showcase

175 Advertiser Index



Follow Stereophile on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/stereophilemag.





Hear it all,
without hearing
all about it.



Fathom® IWS
In-Wall Subwoofer Systems

stereophile

DECEMBER 2015

EDITOR JOHN ATKINSON
MUSIC EDITOR ROBERT BAIRD
DEPUTY EDITOR ART DUDLEY
SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
MICHAEL FREMER, MICHAEL LAVORGNA,
KALMAN RUBINSON
WEB PRODUCER JON IVERSON

FOUNDER J. GORDON HOLT
COVER PHOTO ERIC SWANSON

ART DIRECTOR JEREMY MOYLER

MANAGING EDITOR RUSTY KURTZ

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS (AUDIO)

JIM AUSTIN, BRIAN DAMKROGER, ROBERT DEUTSCH,
LARRY GREENHILL, JON IVERSON, FRED KAPLAN,
DAVID LANDER, ERICK LICHTER, PAUL MESSENGER,
HERB REICHERT, MARKUS SAUER, JASON VICTOR SERINUS

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS (MUSIC)

DAVID ADLER, LARRY BIRNBAUM, DANIEL BUCKLEY,
THOMAS CONRAD, RICHARD LEHNERT, ROBERT LEVINE,
FRED MILLS, LELAND RUCKER, DAVID SOKOL, JOHN SWENSON

ADVERTISING

GENERAL MANAGER KEITH PRAY
(212) 915-4157, KPRAY@ENTHUSIASTNETWORK.COM
ADVERTISING MANAGER ED DIBENEDETTO (212) 915-4153,
EDIBENEDETTO@ENTHUSIASTNETWORK.COM
ADVERTISING MANAGER LAURA J. LOVECCHIO,
LOVECCHIO ASSOCIATES, CENTRAL & WEST COAST,
NATIONAL RETAILERS, CLASSIFIEDS (718) 745-5025,
LAURA_LOVECCHIO@SBCGLOBAL.NET
SALES COORDINATOR ROSEMARIE TORCIVIA
(212) 915-4160, RTORCIVIA@ENTHUSIASTNETWORK.COM
DIGITAL INQUIRIES KEITH PRAY,
KPRAY@ENTHUSIASTNETWORK.COM
MUSIC MANAGER ILKO NECHEV
(212) 490-2079, ILKO@MITCHELLADGROUP.COM

MANUFACTURING & PRODUCTION OPERATIONS

VP, MANUFACTURING & AD OPERATIONS GREG PARNELL
SENIOR DIRECTOR, AD OPERATIONS PAULINE ATWOOD
AD COORDINATOR BRE REKENTHALER
ARCHIVIST THOMAS VOEHRINGER

ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

MANAGEMENT
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR KASEY KELLEY
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, DIGITAL CHRIS MAURO
FINANCE DIRECTOR ADAM MINER

DIGITAL GROUP

DIGITAL DIRECTOR, ENGINEERING JEFF KIMMEL
SENIOR PRODUCT MANAGER RISHI KUMAR
SENIOR PRODUCT MANAGER MARC BARTELL
CREATIVE DIRECTOR PETER TRACY

TEN: THE ENTHUSIAST NETWORK, LLC

CHAIRMAN PETER ENGLEHART
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER SCOTT P. DICKEY
EVP, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER BILL SUTMAN
PRESIDENT, AUTOMOTIVE SCOTT BAILEY
EVP, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER ALAN ALPANI
EVP, SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT NORB GARRETT
EVP, CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER ANGUS MACKENZIE
EVP, OPERATIONS KEVIN MULLAN
EVP, SALES & MARKETING ERIC SCHWAB
SVP, DIGITAL OPERATIONS DAN BEDNAR
SVP, SALES OPERATIONS MATT BOICE
SVP, FINANCIAL PLANNING MIKE CUMMINGS
SVP, AUTOMOTIVE DIGITAL GEOFF DEFRANCE
VP, EDITORIAL OPERATIONS AMY DIAMOND
SVP, CONTENT STRATEGY, AUTOMOTIVE DAVID FREIBURGER
SVP, DIGITAL, SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT GREG MORROW
VP, DIGITAL MONETIZATION ELISABETH MURRAY
SVP, MARKETING RYAN PAYNE
EVP, MIND OVER EYE BILL WADSWORTH

CONSUMER MARKETING, ENTHUSIAST MEDIA SUBSCRIPTION COMPANY, INC.

SVP, CIRCULATION TOM SLATER
VP, RETENTION & OPERATIONS FULFILLMENT
DONALD T. ROBINSON III

IMPORTANT STEREOPHILE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

US & CANADA SUBSCRIPTIONS (800) 666-3746,
Stereophile@emailcustomerservice.com
Stereophile, Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235
Please include name, address, and phone number
on any inquiries
INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTIONS (386) 447-6383
EDITORIAL Tel: (212) 915-4156, Fax: (212) 915-4167
JOHN ATKINSON jatkinson@enthusiastnetwork.com
ROBERT BAIRD rbaird@enthusiastnetwork.com
BACK ISSUES, IPS, CDS (888) 237-0955
STEREOPHILE WEBSITE www.stereophile.com

REPRINTS

Contact Wright's Media at (877) 652-5295
(or (281) 419-5725 outside the US and Canada) to
purchase quality custom reprints or e-prints of articles
appearing in this publication.

SUBMISSIONS

Any submissions or contributions from readers shall
be subject to and governed by TEN: The Enthusiast
Network's User Content Submission Terms and
Conditions, which are posted at
<http://www.enthusiastnetwork.com/submissions/>

BACK ISSUES

To order back issues, visit
<https://www.circsource.com/store/storeBackIssues.html>

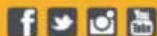
CANADA POST

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: IMEX
Global Solutions, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2

SUBSCRIBER LIST

Occasionally our subscriber list is made available to
reputable firms offering goods and services we believe
would be of interest to our readers. If you prefer to be
excluded, please send your current address label and a
note requesting to be excluded from these promotions to:
TEN: The Enthusiast Network, LLC, 831 S. Douglas St.,
El Segundo, CA 90245, Attn: Privacy Coordinator.





THE NEW FATHOM® v2

EVEN CLOSER TO PERFECTION.

Our critically-acclaimed Fathom® subwoofer formula has been fortified with **20% more amplifier power, improved drivers, a powerful DSP engine** and an all-new, high-resolution **Digital Automatic Room Optimization** system.

The resulting performance leap is profound.

Contact your authorized JL Audio retailer for an audition, and remember that great subwoofers are best enjoyed in pairs.



The Ultimate Amplification System



Black
by bel canto

Musicians know that leaving the right amount of space between notes creates connection, articulation, and emotion. The passion to experience music at this level is why we developed the Black System.

Black's revolutionary design rethinks the audio system, reaching beyond traditional concepts to achieve unprecedented transparency. Black's three chassis system optimizes and controls the signal from any source, delivering extraordinary dynamics, clarity, and presence, even at low listening levels. Nothing is lost.

We rethink the audio system so you experience music like never before. Feel the excitement of Bel Canto Black.

www.belcantodesign.com/black

LETTERS

FEEDBACK TO THE EDITOR

Play Music the Listener Likes

Editor:

In September 2015 ["As We See It," p.3], Ken Micallef asked why people hate us audiophiles. Like most prejudices, it's based on ignorance. However, I am bothered by the fact that new generations of music lovers don't know what good audio sounds like. Obviously, they share the love and passion for music, as most [music] lovers and audiophiles do. However, younger listeners don't know how much of their favorite music is hidden by barely adequate playback systems.

To introduce newbies to my audiophile world, I try to play music my listener is familiar with. Like the suggestion Ken quotes from Roscoe Trey Nicholson: Play something from the listener's record collection. When they hear it on a good system, all sorts of magic is unleashed. Let the music speak for itself, in all its glory. Remember, audiophiles began as lovers of music.

Finally, there is an annoying "elitism" in the audio world, and it's disrespectful. Several months ago, in San Francisco, I was at a high-end stereo boutique, listening to a speaker manufacturer promote a \$15,000 pair of speakers. He delighted in playing from his Apple computer esoteric pieces of music recorded in New Mexico, and other pieces of music not typically of the mainstream. In another listening room, the same company had their top-of-the-line, \$30,000/pair speakers connected to similarly priced equipment. When I asked the representative doing the demonstration to play something familiar, like Miles Davis, Chicago, or Santana, he dismissed me, and kept playing from an esoteric music list.

Hey, boutique store owners, I have several copies of *Kind of Blue*, *Abraxas*, and the Allman Brothers Band's *At Fillmore East*, and I have lots of records in multiple formats and editions. I can better judge a piece of equipment with music I am intimately familiar with. Don't blow me off—there are a lot more buyers of *Kind of Blue* and *Chicago Transit Authority* than people who buy cantina music by local unknowns in a dusty desert eatery!

Also, the industry caters to big spending, which fuels the misconception that good audio is achievable only with big bucks. That's like saying the only way

to enjoy a good car ride is to spend \$100,000. Worse, the industry unconsciously promotes the idea of "The more you spend, the better the ride," which is an outright lie.

Recently, I rediscovered audio by going back to 1970s-era equipment. For less than \$200, I found a 40Wpc stereo receiver, with phono stage and FM tuner, that would cost \$1500 today (sans FM), to be the heart of an excellent system! \$300 for a new plastic turntable? A used 1970s turntable for under \$100 with a new cartridge is a better investment than any of today's \$300 crap plastic spinners in your choice of three eye-blinding colors!

People look on audiophiles with mixed, often negative, views. I say it's because the notion of acquiring expensive equipment as a necessity overshadows what people crave: good music reproduced in all the glory and subtleties the artist and producer intended. It's always been about the music; the equipment is just a means to that end. The industry has the wrong proportions and wrong emphases.

—James Wong

San Francisco, CA
citznkane1@aol.com

Does High-End Audio Have a Future?

Editor:

As a lawyer, I like facts or documents that establish their point without the need for any explanation. With that in mind, I considered the above question.

In Class A of the "Two-Channel Power Amplifiers: Solid-State" section of *Stereophile's* "Recommended Components" are 21 products. Total cost is \$802,488. Divided by 21 products, this gives an average price of \$38,214.

If we use the old Olympic scoring method and throw out the low (ATC P1, \$3999) and the high (DartZeel NHB-458, \$151,000/pair) the total cost

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR should be sent as faxes or e-mails only. Fax: (212) 915-4167. E-mail: STletters@sorc.com. Please note: We are unable to answer requests for information about specific products or systems. If you have problems with your subscription, call (800) 666-3746, or e-mail Stereophile@palmcoastd.com, or write to *Stereophile*, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235.

TAKE HEED! Unless marked otherwise, all letters to the magazine and its writers are assumed to be for possible publication. In the spirit of vigorous debate implied by the First Amendment, and unless we are requested not to, we publish correspondents' e-mail addresses.

A bricks-and-mortar store selling \$30,000 amplifiers is a boutique for the wealthy.

is \$647,489. Divided by 19 products, this gives an average price of \$34,078.

If one Class A component costs over \$30,000, then the cost of a total system will melt the eyeballs.

The prices of the products reviewed in *Stereophile* during the course of a year seem to confirm that if the wealthy are into High End, then it has a future—but not with consumers. A bricks-and-mortar store selling \$30,000 amplifiers is not yesterday's hi-fi store. It is a boutique for the wealthy. Others need not apply.

—Jeff Lesser

Encino, CA
jless160@msn.com

Cars Are Different

Editor:

I have read a lot of letters about the insane prices of high-end equipment and, personally, the prices do not bother me. To me, it is a variation on an old joke:

"How much is that amp?"

"\$10 million."

"Well, you won't be selling many at that price."

"I only have to sell one, and believe me, there is *somebody* out there who will buy it."

Comparing high-end audio to high-end autos, however, I remember, when Eddie Murphy bought an überexpensive car after his first movie, his thought was, "Girls see it and want to f**k me."

—Alan Wasilauskas
alanwk@live.com

Music as Happiness

Editor:

I have been reading *Stereophile* for the past 25 years and I still love it! I need music to be happy, whether live or reproduced. I have been changing and tweaking my audio equipment for the past 30 years to enjoy music when at home.

In the continuous debate of why audiophilia is a disease affecting a tiny fraction of that large mass of people enjoying

music every day, I would like to stop the critique of listening to background music. Using an expensive audio system for background music still allows me to tell the difference between a vinyl record and its digital counterpart (whether CD, DVD, or 24-bit/96kHz file), between good and bad vinyl pressings.

The vast majority of human beings listen to music while doing something else. This does not decrease their enjoyment of music. Listening to properly reproduced music in the background while reading or writing is not incompatible with being an audiophile!

—Andrea Tubaro
Rome, Italy
andrea.tubaro@mac.com

Music as Complexity

Editor:

I am an avid fan of *Stereophile*, and have just completed a fairly busy Far Asian trip. I had the privilege of auditioning several high-end audio systems, in addition to attending exemplary classical-music concerts to tune my ears. Eastern philosophies tend to emphasize meditation, which essentially is a way to empty our minds without concentrating on anything specific. Hence, it can be considered as one extreme of the state of

the human mind. At the other extreme we have a chaotic state in which our minds are constantly bombarded by and flooded with external information. Most people tend to live in this state in their daily lives; music is, at best, a companion assuming a background role, and audio has no particular significance.

In between these two extremes lies a sweet spot for the fortuitous few, in which listening to music has a special meaning. Music is a complex endeavor consisting of things like melody, harmony, and rhythm, and is best enjoyed through a well-set-up audio system reproducing it with a soundstage, image, dynamics, and timbre that are true to the originals. Therefore, music, with its complexity, thrives at the edge of chaos but is by no means chaotic. When we listen, we audiophiles like to concentrate on music and sound. It definitely is distinct from meditation, as well as from chaos. It is a place somewhere in between that, through concentration, allows our minds to enter into a new realm.

We audiophiles should cherish our hobby, and enjoy occupying this sweet spot between meditation and chaos, since most people tend to occupy the chaotic spot.

—Dr. Okan Geray

Dubai, United Arab Emirates
ogeray01@yahoo.com

The Drive

Editor:

"Hey, let's go for a drive."

You've heard that statement before—in fact, you probably have uttered those words yourself. What do you want to do on "the drive"? You probably take in the scenery—sometimes the goal is the destination, sometimes the mere experience of traveling and viewing the world through the lens of your own particular vehicle as the miles flow behind you. You drive, and you experience the surroundings with as many senses as you allow.

Experiencing music is a lot like going for a drive: It's not the same for everyone. I am of modest budget, with limited financial means that I can devote to increasing my "audiophile" need. I do as many of you do: I read this magazine (and others like it), experiencing vicariously—if in no other way—the joys and successes of those able to afford true high-end audio equipment. I have equipment, some of it bought with knowledge gained from the reviews in this magazine, that balances on that unique line between quality and affordability. But that doesn't

Hafler®

hafler.com



Al Schmitt

Chief Engineer - Capitol Records
(Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, Steely Dan, Yo-Yo Mah)

"I have been using Hafler for over 25 years and I have never been disappointed. The performance is outstanding, and the dynamics are just what I look for."

Hafler Brings Excitement to Your Ears!



Introducing the HA75 tube headphone amplifier!

Listening to music through headphones should be more than simply shutting out the world. It should be about enhancing the listening experience so that you get more.

Enter the HA75 Tube Head. It features a high voltage tube drive for incredible warmth and a dedicated control that lets you fine tune the negative feedback from clinically accurate to old school. To bring greater realism to the experience, the Focus™ control employs a unique matrix to simulate the sound as if listening to music in a room. And for those that want to kick up the beat, turn on the three position bass extender and start dancing! With two headphone outputs, you can share the experience in quiet comfort.

The Hafler HA75 Tube-Head... Excitement and realism for your listening pleasure.

dynaco™

Hafler and Dynaco are trademarks of
Radial Engineering Ltd. 1588 Kebet
Way, Port Coquitlam BC V3C 5M5



mean I can't appreciate what others have that I don't.

I need to know that such Nirvana exists. I need to know that there is something to yearn for—to know that \$65,000 Magico Q5 speakers are going to sound a helluva lot better than a pair of \$40 RadioShacks! You may have the means to afford that \$20,000 turntable, that \$8000 cartridge, and that \$5000 tonearm—not to mention the cables, phono stage, amps, speakers, etc.! The closest I'll get to those items, most likely, is within the pages of this fine magazine.

But is it really about the gear I or others have? Or, like a drive through the beautiful fall countryside, is it really about me and others getting a chance to experience something special? It's *really* about the experience of the music.

When I drop the needle onto my favorite vinyl record or spin a favorite CD (right now, it's the pounding rhythms and multiple layers of "Hawkmoon 629," from the LP of U2's *Rattle and Hum*; and the euphoric cellos of Luka Sulic and Stjepan Hauser—*ie*, 2Cellos—playing U2's "With or Without You" live) what I hear coming through my modest but good system gives me chills and brings that ear-to-ear smile! Sure, it's not coming

through a \$50,000 system, but my experience is mine, and it's doing what music is supposed to do to our human souls: move us. Move us in a way that defies words, defies descriptions, makes us shake our heads in disbelief—and also gives us that precious moment in time when everything seems to be perfect.

It is "the drive." Is it really about the car I'm riding in, or is it really about the experience of the surroundings that makes it so special? I may not be traveling down the wonderful countryside in an \$80,000 car that rides as if it's on a wave, but that doesn't stop me from enjoying what I'm seeing out my window. We get the same view—yes, you in your luxury automobile might enjoy amenities I can't have, but I can still appreciate the sights, smells, and sounds I experience.

To each of us, music is "the drive." I want to dream about cruising in that car I can't afford, and I want to dream about what hearing U2's "With or Without You" on a \$100,000 system must be like. Even though that's likely never to happen for me, I'm going to meticulously work to make the system I have give me more of the experience I crave. I'm going to stay up late at night, letting that LP, CD, or media file give me that ear-to-ear

smile. I'm going to let the music be the vehicle that drives me to a place I can't go by myself—and enjoy the ride!

—Brian Bertini
Glenwood, IA
bertfamily@q.com

The Parasound Halo CD 1

Editor:

Your October 2015 issue included the Parasound Halo CD 1 as a recommended Class A CD player, yet the product was discontinued two months ago. The manufacturer's website provides no additional information, and trade publications such as yours remain in blackout mode. What gives?

—E.F. Brock
efbrock@cox.net

When we compile "Recommended Components," we contact each product's manufacturer and ask what the product's current price is and if it has been discontinued. In July 2015, while gathering this information for the October issue, we were told that the Halo CD 1 was still available. In September, when I received your e-mail, I contacted Richard Schram of Parasound, who responded: "The reader is partly correct. . . . The CD 1 was discontinued recently, after the deadline for confirming 'Recommended Components.'" —John Atkinson

...a bridge over troubled audio

Jensen wrote the book on magnetic bridge technology and after 40 years, continues to design and produce isolation transformers with the least noise, lowest distortion and widest frequency response of any in the industry. Jensen... the world's finest transformers.

jensen™ transformers

www.jensen-transformers.com
Jensen Transformers Inc. 9304 Deering Avenue Chatsworth, CA 91311

The Jensen Iso-Max® CI-2RR stereo audio ground loop eliminator received the prestigious CEDIA Electronic Lifestyles® Product award as a significant contributor to the advancement of the home theater install industry.

* Appearance and specifications are subject to change without notice.

VINYL LIVES HERE

ACOUSTIC SOUNDS^{INC.}

SHOP THE BEST AUDIOPHILE MUSIC

THE BEACH BOYS



PRESENTED IN ULTIMATE QUALITY

14 classic Beach Boy titles, mastered by Kevin Gray at Coherent Audio, cut on 200-gram vinyl, pressed by Quality Record Pressings. Visit acousticsounds.com for details.

PRESSED IN MONO & STEREO LP
ALSO AVAILABLE ON SACD

ROGER WATERS



AMUSED TO DEATH AAPP 468761

The 2015 2 LP 200-gram vinyl edition, remastered audio completed by longtime Roger Waters / Pink Floyd collaborator and co-producer, James Guthrie, pressed at Quality Record Pressings.

Also available as new 5.1 surround
Hybrid Multichannel SACD remix by
James Guthrie

DUKE ELLINGTON



MASTERPIECES BY ELLINGTON AAPP 4418

A historic record - recorded just four years removed from the dawn of the analog tape era! Recorded on an Ampex 200, using 3M-111 magnetic tape running at 15 inches per second. Pressed at Quality Record Pressings.

Also available on Hybrid Mono SACD



TONY BENNETT
At Carnegie Hall



HARRY BELAFONTE
Sings The Blues



JEFF BECK
Blow By Blow



JEFF BECK
Wired



THE BEACH BOYS
Pet Sounds

CAT STEVENS TEA FOR THE TILLERMAN



DOUBLE DSD NAPP0350120

Easily the most famous Double DSD download brought to market to date! Mastered by George Marino at Sterling Sound. Download files authored direct to native DSD from analog tape by Gus Skinas.

Also available on 45 RPM, 33 1/3 RPM
and Hybrid Stereo SACD.

LYN STANLEY - POTIONS

BATM 3103



Lyn Stanley returns with classic song hits of the 1950s — captivating and imaginative. Produced by renowned jazz pianist/composer Kenny Werner. Recorded and mixed by Al Schmitt; mastered by Bernie Grundman. All songs mixed and mastered on analog tape.

Available on 45 RPM, Hybrid Stereo SACD, Reel To Reel! (Two 10.5" Laser-Engraved Reels + Insert + Signed Photo/ IEC/ 15ips/ 1/4" Tape), Double DSD, Single DSD and Hi-Res PCM Download.

LYN STANLEY - LOST IN ROMANCE

AATM 3101



"You will not hear a more naturally recorded female voice than you'll hear on the record. *Lost In Romance* is one album where the outstanding sound is matched by the music making." Music = 9/11; Sound = 11/11 — Michael Fremer, *AnalogPlanet.com*.

Available on 45 RPM, Hybrid Stereo SACD, Single DSD and
Hi-Res PCM Download!



THE WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION OF AUDIOPHILE RECORDINGS

ACOUSTICSOUNDS.COM | SUPERHIREZ.COM | 800.716.3553

VINYL LIVES HERE

ACOUSTIC SOUNDS^{INC.}

SHOP THE BEST AUDIOPHILE EQUIPMENT

ROGUE AUDIO



SPHINX

HYBRID INTEGRATED AMP
with remote, 100 wpc

Available in Silver and Black

M SPHINXB



PHAROAH

HYBRID INTEGRATED AMP
with remote, 175 wpc

Available in Silver and Black

M PHAROAHB

AURALiC



VEGA

DIGITAL AUDIO PROCESSOR

E VEGA



ARIES

EXTREME BRIDGE STREAMER

E ARIES

CHORD ELECTRONICS LIMITED



HUGO TT

DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

Available in Silver and Black

E HUGOTTB



CHORDETTE

2QUITE DAC

Available in Silver and Black

E 2QUITEB

HIGH OUTPUT



ORTOFON 2M

BLACK
T 2M BLK

HIGH OUTPUT



ORTOFON 2M

BRONZE
T 2M BRZ

LOW OUTPUT



ORTOFON MC

CADENZA BLUE
T CAD BLU

LOW OUTPUT



ORTOFON MC

QUINTET - BRONZE
T QUIN BRZ

LOW OUTPUT



ORTOFON MC

QUINTET - BLACK
T QUIN BLK

ATC SPEAKERS

6" SL 2 WAY LOUDSPEAKERS
SCM19 v2

K SCM19 SCH



Available in Satin Cherry and Black

SPIN CLEAN

RECORD CLEANING
COMPLETE SYSTEM KIT



Complete System Kit E WASHSYS PKG
includes: Record Washer and Lid, 4 oz.
bottle of Record Cleaning Concentrate, 32
oz. bottle of Record Cleaning Concentrate,
2 pair of Washer Brushes MKII, 1 pair of
Washer Rollers MKII, 7 washable Drying
Cloths and insurcutions.



DR. FEICKERT ANALOGUE

NEXT GENERATION
UNIVERSAL PROTRACTOR

O PNG



THE WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION OF AUDIOPHILE RECORDINGS

ACOUSTICSOUNDS.COM | SUPERHIREZ.COM | 800.716.3553

2015
NEW
PRODUCT



aurender

REFERENCE MUSIC SYSTEMS

N100H Caching Network Music Player

- 2TB internal storage
- 120GB SSD for caching playback
- Cached playback of internal and NAS music files
- Clean USB audio class 2.0 output
- Full linear power supply
- Machined aluminum case; 3.0 inch AMOLED display
- Gigabit Ethernet LAN Port for Network Connectivity
- Aurender Conductor App controls a variety of modes, including artist name, song title, etc, including TIDAL lossless streaming

Aurender App

Aurender comes with a dedicated Aurender Conductor App, hailed by reviewers worldwide, which has been specially tuned for performance and convenience. The Aurender iPad and Android app has been developed with a huge music database in mind and exceptionally fast browsing/searching of your favorite music. It's very intuitive and easy to use.



TIDAL

Enjoy 25 million lossless CD quality music tracks with the world's best sounding Music Server. All Aurender Servers and Players support the TIDAL service fully. You can easily play music from your NAS, on Aurender's HDD or music from the TIDAL service using the same app.

INDUSTRY UPDATE

AUDIO NEWS & VIEWS

UK: WHITTLEBURY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Paul Messenger

Judging by the surprisingly healthy attendance at this year's National Audio Show (NAS), in Whittlebury (September 19–20), we might be inching our way out of a hi-fi recession that has been with us for seven long years. Hi-fi has had its brighter moments, for sure, and has remained strong in a few markets, but those have been the exceptions rather than the rule—nor could anyone accuse the music biz of being overburdened with new talent.

Still, NAS gave cause for some optimism, for the industry as a whole and for this show in particular. Throughout its 15 years, NAS seems to have struggled in comparison to the much better-established Sound & Vision: The Bristol Show, held each February. However, Sound & Vision is a “selling” show organized by the Audio T/Audio Excellence chain of dealers, and therefore mostly features manufacturer-ex-

hibitors rather than competing dealers. Whittlebury had plenty of those, of course, but they were outnumbered by the rooms run by dealers and dealer-importers (the latter an increasingly significant growth sector I talk more about below).

This makes visiting and reporting on NAS rather more confusing, as one often encounters curious combinations of products made by different brands. However, one positive consequence was a combined operation between Leicester-based dealer *Cymbiosis* and manufacturers **Kudos** (speakers) and **The Chord Company** (cables). Two identical rooms had nominally identical pairs of Kudos Titan 808 speakers, one set driven by a complete **Linn Products** Exakt active system with line-level crossovers, the other with conventional passive crossovers by a high-class conventional system from **Naim Audio**. Short of visiting such a dealer's showroom, I don't think enthusiasts would often have the op-



Clockwise from upper left: Zeta Zero's Orbital 360 omnidirectional speaker; the new dCS Rossini CD player/streamer (see p.25); the ME-Geithain monitors.

SUBMISSIONS: Those promoting audio-related seminars, shows, and meetings should e-mail the when, where, and who to JAtkinson@enthusiastnetwork.com at least eight weeks before the month of the event. The deadline for the February 2016 issue is November 20, 2015.

CALENDAR OF INDUSTRY EVENTS

ATTENTION ALL AUDIO SOCIETIES:

We have a page on the *Stereophile* website dedicated solely to you: www.stereophile.com/audiophile-societies. If you'd like to have your audio-society information posted on the site, e-mail Chris Vogel at info@XLinkAudio.com.

Please note that it is inappropriate for a retailer to promote a new product line in “Calendar” unless this is associated with a seminar or similar event.

ARIZONA

■ Wednesday, December 2: The **Arizona Audio Video Club** will hold its monthly meeting at **LMC Home Entertainment**, in Tempe. This meeting will feature **Magnepan** speakers. Guests are welcome and refreshments will be served. For more information, contact AAVC president Jeffrey Behr at jeffreybehr@cox.net, or USA Tube Audio at (800) 676-1085.

CALIFORNIA

■ Thursday, December 3, 8–11 pm: **AudioVision San Francisco** (1628 California Street, San Francisco 94109) presents “From Digital to Analog,” an evening event focusing on the latest and greatest in digital and analog playback; with Robert Watts, chief designer of **Chord Hugo**, and hosted by Jeff Dorgay, of **TONEAudio** webzine: hybrid electrostatic loudspeakers from **JansZen**, tube electronics from **Octave**, digital and analog cables from **Nordost**, innovative DAC technology from **Chord Electronics**, world-class streaming devices from **Lumin**, audio servers from **Aria**, turntables from **EAT** and **Dr. Feickert Analogue**, and a very special room featuring **Devialet** Phantom digital powered speakers. A seminar will be presented by representatives from each company. Refreshments will be served, and a drawing will be held for

portunity to make such an interesting comparison.

Cymbiosis was by no means the only dealer that took a room to promote itself and its wares, and this is where the dealer-importer comes in. This phenomenon is clearly to some extent a function of a substantial increase in the number of audio brands looking for global distribution, combined with an overall contraction

Clockwise from right: Leema's Lee Taylor with the metal baffle for the Xen Elite speaker; the Cute Blue Aura amp and speakers; the Kudos/Linn Exakt dem.



some FREE goodies! Come in for a wonderful and informative evening. RSVP: info@audiovisionsf.com or (415) 614-1118. For the latest info, check www.audiovisionsf.com.

■ Sunday, December 6, 11am-3:30pm: The **Los Angeles and Orange County Audio Society** will host its 22nd Annual Society Gala and Awards Banquet in the Grand Ballroom of the Holiday Inn, Buena Park (7000 Beach Boulevard). Harry Weisfeld, founder of **VPI Industries**, will receive the Founder's Award for 2015 and give the keynote address. In addition, Bob Attiyeh of **Yarlung Records** will be honored with the Society's Humanitarian Award. Michael Fremer, senior contributing editor of **Stereophile**, will introduce Harry Weisfeld. **Eastwind Import** will bring LPs and CDs for sale. Look forward to an extravagant holiday buffet and raffle prizes. Tickets will be available for credit-card purchase at our website, www.laocas.com. Guests, visitors, and new members are invited, and parking is free. For more info, visit www.laocas.com or



CLEARAUDIO Concept Turntable
\$1,599



MUSIC HALL Ikura Turntable
\$1,195



AVID Acutus Reference SP Turntable
\$26,995



VPI Classic Signature
\$5,999



REGA RP10 Turntable
\$5,495



PRO-JECT Xtension 10 Turntable
\$3,250

call Bob Levi at (714) 281-5850.

■ Sunday, January 31, 2-5pm: The **Los Angeles & Orange County Audio Society** will hold its monthly meeting at **The Source Audio/Video Design Group**, in Torrance (3035 Kashiwa Street). Our hosts, Steven and Jason Lord, will demonstrate top-of-the-line equipment in spaces custom designed to maximize your musical (and visual) enjoyment. Listen to **Boulder, Dan D'Agostino, Denon, Linn, Marantz, MBL, McIntosh, Pearl Evolution, Simaudio Moon, Sonus Faber, Totem Acoustic, Wadia**, and other fine examples of high-end equipment that will allow those attending to make comparisons and/or just enjoy the music. Special industry guests will include David Janszen, electrostatic guru and president of **JansZen Loudspeaker Co., Ltd.**; and Bruce Ball, vice-president of **Questyle Audio Technology**, presenting preamplifiers, headphone amplifiers, wireless solutions, and portable high-resolution players. Jason Lord will also make a special presentation



Mark Hockey with AKG's N90Q headphones.

of the audio industry and a consequent decrease in the number of specialty dealers. It's hardly surprising that some of the smaller, newer brands are happy to accept the limitations of having their products carried by a single retail outlet in each of a number of different countries, at least for the short term.

At NAS I was pleased to meet again Tomasz Rogula, of the Polish audio manufacturer **Zeta Zero** (www.zetazero.org), whom I'd previously met at the High End show, in Munich, and who was now showing his Orbital 360 loudspeaker, whose top section is a ribbon that radiates sound through a full 360°. Rogula was sharing the Audio Emotion room with the well-established German brand **MBL**, which also makes speakers with omnidirectional midrange and treble radiators.

Manufacturer **Leema Acoustics'** new lease on life includes principal Lee Taylor's experiments with metal loudspeaker enclosures. Taking full advantage of the latest CAD and CNC techniques, Taylor has developed a metal version of his tiny, five-liter Xen stand-mounted monitor, to be called the Xen Elite and to sell at roughly twice the price of the original, which costs £1295/pair (\$1970). He's now working on a metal-jacketed version of the floorstanding Xavier.

Every audio show needs an oasis of sanity, and in one of the smaller rooms of Whittlebury Hall I found **Sound-Link ProAudio** playing some very nice piano recordings through

NEW *READY-FOR-PRIMETIME* PLAYER

MADE IN USA
VPI Prime Turntable
\$3,800



three powered studio monitors from German company **ME-Geithain** (aka MusikElectronic Geithain GmbH), all featuring essentially coaxial drivers. The whole thing seemed very civilized. Much the same could be said of the very different demonstration I experienced in the room occupied by **Art Audio**, whose tube amplifiers were driving a vintage pair of **Tannoy** GRFs with 15" Gold drivers.

I'd never before encountered **Lawrence Audio**, founded in Taiwan in 1996 by Lawrence Liao. I found them and their strange-looking Violin SE loudspeaker in *The Audio Consul-*

tants' room. Another Taiwanese brand I'd not heard of is **Blue Aura**, though their v30i Blackline hybrid tubed amplifier was designed in Cambridge, England. The v30i is very much oriented toward the playing of MP3s and use with smartphones, small Bluetooth speakers, and the like.

The **Headzones** at NAS seemed as popular as ever. The most interesting newcomer was arguably a pair of **AKG** N90Q circumaural headphones that seemed almost absurdly hi-tech. "Inspired by" respected composer and music producer Quincy Jones, the N90Qs incorporate something

that AKG's parent company, Harman International, calls TruNote, which "personalizes" the headphones' sound by means of software that uses four microphones to automatically calibrate the N90Qs' output to the characteristics of the user's ear canals. Noise cancellation is also incorporated.

Another maker of headphone electronics that attracted my attention was Californian **Schiit Audio**, whose range of products seems ever-expanding. Mark Dolbear, of UK importer **Electromod**, told me he can't keep enough of them in stock—they sell through almost immediately.

UK: LONDON

Paul Messenger

As well as the National Audio Show in Whittlebury, September saw several new product launches at London events. **Linn Products**, the best-established of these brands, had set up its wares close to London Waterloo station, in a private residence that used to be a violin factory. There they showed a number of new products, the most significant arguably being two slim, active floorstanding models in Linn's Series 5, each including Linn's Exakt crossover system: the two-way 520 and the three-way 530 with Isobarik woofers. With respective volumes of 20 and 30 liters, both are surprisingly compact and potentially very colorful. The two models look almost identical, though

the 530 is a little larger in each dimension (37.2" high by 9" wide by 12.7" deep) than the 520 (34.8" high by 8.7" wide by 8.5" deep), weighs almost twice as much (66 vs 39.6 lbs), and includes three, not two, Linn Chakras: spring-decoupled, 100W power amps. Both models also include Linn's radical Space Optimisation+.¹

Besides their compact dimensions, what greatly distinguishes the Series 5 530 and 520 speakers from the herd is their cosmetic treatment. Each model is wrapped in a "sleeve" of what Linn calls Fabrik (naturally), in a choice of 11 colors and patterns. Some of these are plain and discreet, such as the genuine Hebridean Harris tweed; others are wild and full of color, from Scottish design house Timorous

Beasties (named after Robert Burns's poem "To a Mouse"). Linn claims that any undesirable acoustic effects of the Fabriks are eliminated by their Exakt signal processing. Glass plates, available in gray, white, or black, are fitted top and bottom; both these and the sleeves can be changed if desired.

Besides the active Series 5s, Linn has added three new models (from KEF, PMC, and JBL) to the speakers that can have Exakt support, and is introducing three new Exaktbox digital crossover-DACs for users of separates: the eight-channel Majik Exaktbox 1, the six-channel Akurate Exaktbox (to supplement the existing 10-channel version), and the Exaktbox Sub. As it's

¹ See www.stereophile.com/content/exakt-exakt-networked-linn-speaker-system.

of **Pearl Evolution** loudspeakers. **Eastwind Import** will be on hand to offer personally selected vinyl and CDs for sale. A raffle is planned and an extraordinary lunch will be served. Free parking nearby. Guests, visitors, and new members are invited. For more information, visit www.laocas.com or call Bob Levi at (714) 281-5850.

FLORIDA

■ Saturday, November 14, 1-4pm: The **Space Coast Audio Society** will hold its monthly meeting at the Cascades Club House (1025 Clear Lake Drive, Deland). Douglas Hurlburt (founder) and David Skolnik (sales and marketing director) of **Dynamic Sounds Associates** will present their new DSA Amp II solid-state, class-A amplifier, and their Phono II phono preamplifier and Pre I line stage. All LPs are welcome. RSVP to Chris Vogel (SCAS) at scas@xlinkaudio.com or (386) 423-4650; or to David Skolnik

(DSA) at david@dynamicssounds-assoc.com or (386) 873-2388.

GEORGIA

■ Sunday, November 15, 2-5pm: The **Audio Video Club of Atlanta** and **Oracle Audio Technologies** of Quebec, Canada, host a showcase of Oracle's latest products, including the Delphi Mk.6 Gen.II turntable, the Paris PH-100 and -200-series phono preamps, and the Paris 250-series CD players. Guests welcome; refreshments provided. Location: Dunwoody North Driving Clubhouse, 4522 Kingsgate Drive, Dunwoody 30338. For information, contact president John Morrison at (770) 330-3919 or jhm3@bellsouth.net; or VP Chuck Bruce at (770) 550-1434 or chucksaudio@mindspring.com. Visit the club's website for latest details: www.a-vcoa.org.

LOUISIANA

■ Friday, November 13, 4pm: **Wilson Audio** (3133 Edenborn Avenue, Metairie) will host a Q&A event with **Rogue Audio's** Mark O'Brien and Bill Magerman. This will be a great opportunity to speak with Rogue's designer and learn about his design philosophy. To reserve a seat or for more information, please call Doug at (504) 888-8851.

MICHIGAN

■ Friday, December 11, 5-9pm: **David Michael Audio** (4341 Delemere Court, Royal Oak 48073) will host an event showcasing and demonstrating the **Naim** 500-series components. Models will include the NDX with the NAPS555-DR, NAC552, and NAP500-DR, and all the best Naim cables. Confirmed guest presenters include Emmanuel Le Quéré and François Cauchon, of **Audio Plus Services**. Hors d'oeuvres and refreshments will be

JERRY RASKIN'S NEEDLEDOCTOR

Established 1979

WWW.NEEDLEDOCTOR.COM

...TRANSPARENT, CONVINCING, AND ACCURATE.

ORTOFON 2M RED PHONO CARTRIDGE ▶

ONLY \$100.00

"The ORTOFON 2M RED raises the bar for budget cartridge performance. You won't find a cartridge in the range that pulls more detail from the groove. Sonically, the 2M Red is transparent, convincing, and accurate."

ortofon 2M



ORTOFON 2M SERIES PHONO CARTRIDGES



ORTOFON 2M BLUE
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$236

ORTOFON 2M BRONZE
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$440

ORTOFON 2M BLACK
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$755

ORTOFON 2M 78
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$125

ORTOFON 2M MONO
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$356



Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

**WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION
OF TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES, AND NEEDLES!**

Venere S

THE SIGNATURE
OF EXCELLENT SOUND



A COMPLETE EVOLUTION
OF THE VENERE COLLECTION
COMBINING SOUND, STYLE,
AND ITALIAN CRAFTMANSHIP.

Sonus faber

sonusfaber.com

also the most universal Exaktbox, the Sub is arguably the most interesting: Its two channels are designed to provide time alignment and phase accuracy for one or two subwoofers, using Linn's Konfig setup program.

Later that day, a company brand-new to hi-fi showed its first product. **Entotem**, based in Derby, in Derbyshire, was well established as a maker of data-storage systems for computers, but a change in the company's circumstance, an enthusiasm for hi-fi among key personnel, and a desire to keep the team together led to the decision to use its expertise in digital storage to develop the Plato, an attractive 2TB server. The Plato looks relatively plain from the front, with just a modest display and a socket for USB thumb drives, but it can output 45Wpc via the two pairs of Neutrik Speakon sockets on its rear panel.

But used with the appropriate Android app (Apple iOS is promised soon), the Plato becomes more than a music-storage medium. It includes an analog-to-digital converter for ripping LPs, and is backed up by Grace-note integration of metadata. It can also accommodate movie files, and includes online streaming and Internet radio. Its innards comprise four discrete modules and a shielded linear power supply is well separated from the rest. The Plato appears a useful product, though naiveté and a lack of domestic audio industry experience among Entotem's principals remain worrisome (the use of Speakon connectors, for example).

One of the other journalists at the Entotem event had attended a **dCS** launch at dealer **KJ Leisuresound** earlier that day, which had been poorly attended. I subsequently learned that dCS is replacing the Puccini CD/SACD player with the Rossini, a one-box (save for a master clock) digital network available with or without a disc drive. The Rossini made its formal debut in October at the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest.² US prices will be \$23,999 for the Rossini USB/Ethernet Streaming DAC and \$28,499 for the slightly taller Rossini CD player. ■

² See Jason Victor Serinus's report on the Rossini at www.stereophile.com/content/jasons-first-day-rmaf.



Linn's Exakt 530 loudspeaker finished in (clockwise from top): Harris Tweed, Timorous Blotch, and Scottish Thistle.



served. Space is limited, so RSVP early. Register by sending an e-mail to info@davidmichaelsaudio.com.

MINNESOTA

■ Tuesday, November 17, 7-9pm: The **Audio Society of Minnesota** will hold its monthly meeting at the Pavek Museum of Broadcasting (3517 Raleigh Avenue, St. Louis Park 55416). Refreshments will be served, and guests, visitors, and new members are welcome. For more information, visit our website: www.audiomn.org.

■ Tuesday, January 19, 7-9pm: This month's **Audio Society of Minnesota** meeting will be held in our newly remodeled and much larger listening room at the Pavek Museum of Broadcasting (3517 Raleigh Avenue, St. Louis Park 55416). Our January meeting is one of the most popular each year:

our annual bring-and-brag listening session. Members and guests are encouraged to bring in their vinyl and CDs for an extended listening session on our high-performance audio system. Refreshments will be served, and guests, visitors, and new members are welcome to attend. For more information about this meeting, visit our website: www.audiomn.org.

NEW JERSEY

■ Saturday, November 21, 12-5pm: **Audio Connection** (615 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona) welcomes Garth Leerer and Jesse Luna of **Musical Surroundings** for their fifth annual Analog and Tubes Open House. New products to be featured include the **Aesthetix** Atlas Eclipse stereo power amp, **AMG** Giro turntable with Teatro MC cartridge, **DS Audio** optical cartridge, and **Clearaudio**

Double Matrix Professional Sonic record-cleaning machine. Refreshments will be served. RSVP to (973) 239-1799 or audiocconnect@verizon.net.

WASHINGTON, DC/VIRGINIA/MARYLAND

■ Saturday, December 12, 12-5pm: **Command Performance** (115 Park Avenue, Suite 2, Falls Church, Virginia) welcomes Garth Leerer and Jesse Luna of **Musical Surroundings** for our Holiday Open House. We will feature **Clearaudio's** Statement V2 turntable, Goldfinger Statement cartridge, Absolute Phono phono stage, new Double Matrix Professional Sonic record-cleaning machine, and many other Clearaudio products. Refreshments will be served. RSVP to (703) 532-7239 or info@commandav.com.



PrimaLuna[®]

Our Name Is Sound. You Know It.

"PrimaLuna's DiaLogue Premium HP is an integrated amplifier whose sound quality approaches that of pairings of reference Class A preamps and power amps. PrimaLuna has another winner"

— Robert Deutsch, *Stereophile*, December 2014



\$4399

DiaLogue Premium HP Integrated Amplifier.
The finest tube integrated at any price. Any.



All four PrimaLuna components reviewed by *Stereophile* are rated Class A, meaning *the best without regard to cost*.

- ProLogue Premium Integrated \$2399
- DiaLogue Premium Power Amp \$3199 ea / \$6398 pr
- DiaLogue Premium Integrated \$3399
- DiaLogue Premium HP integrated (pictured) \$4399



PrimaLuna won more 2015 Editor's Choice Awards from *The Absolute Sound* than any other brand.

Go to primaluna-usa.com to get an inside look at our products. You will understand why critics around the world say PrimaLuna makes the best engineered and best built tube components you can buy at any price. info@primaluna-usa.com 909.931.0219

ANALOG CORNER

BY MICHAEL FREMER

THIS ISSUE: Mikey clears up some loose ends.

Everything Counts in Large Amounts

“Does *everything* produce an improvement?” My skeptical visitor, to whom I’d just pointed out some of the acoustic treatments and other accessories in my listening room, wasn’t trying to push my buttons. He just wanted my opinion.

“No,” I said. “Some things make the sound worse—*way* worse—but after all these years, I’m convinced that just about *everything* that can be done to a room or a system produces an audible difference, for better or worse.”

Which is one reason that having on hand multiple full sets of more than one brand of interconnects and cables isn’t merely desirable: For a reviewer, it’s absolutely necessary. Yes, it’s very expensive to have multiple *looms*—or even one—but while I have actually bought and paid for the expensive components of my system, I haven’t paid for most of the cables and interconnects: They’re on long-term loan.

I have on hand full sets of TARA Labs’ Zero Evolution, WireWorld’s Eclipse Platinum 7, and Stealth Audio’s Sakra and Dream (v.10) interconnects and speaker cables, as well as AudioQuest’s WEL Signatures in both types. Everything important that’s plugged into the AC does so with Shunyata Research Sigma series power cords. I also have various lengths of other cables, as listed in the “Associated Equipment” sidebars of my equipment reviews.

I feel sorry for the cable deniers, especially those who’ve spent a lot of money elsewhere in their systems yet persist in believing that wires—especially power cords—can’t possibly make a difference: As anyone who’s taken the time to listen will confirm, wires clearly *do* affect the sound.

Back to my visitor’s question: The go-to wires for my system when it’s not hosting review gear are TARA Labs’ Zero Evolution interconnects and, for the past few years, TARA’s Omega Gold speaker cables. Last year, TARA’s founder, Matthew Bond, sent a set of his new Omega Evolution speaker cables (\$32,000/8’ pair), which are one step below his top model, the Grandmaster Evolution (\$42,000/8’ pair).

The Omega Evolutions cost a good deal more than the Omega Golds (\$24,000/8’ pair), and use considerably more solid-core rectangular copper in a complex, time-consuming construction process that results in two tubes—one each for the positive and negative sides—of even greater girth than the already-fat Omega Golds. (Each run of Omega Gold has a circumference of 4”; for the Omega Evolution, that dimension is 5.5”!)

The many cynics who claim that audiophiles judge sound by sight would predict that I’d go absolutely *wild* for the Omega Evolutions. After all, they’re *bigger*, and *way* more expensive.

Yet when I installed the Omega Evolutions, the sound of



TARA Labs’ Omega Evolution speaker cables offer a choice of terminations.



As anyone who’s taken the time to listen will confirm, wires clearly do affect the sound.

my system took big steps in some wrong directions. The bot-

tom end softened and lacked control. The top became soft and gauzy. Overall, imaging and soundstaging lost focus and dimensionality. Nothing was better. Inserting these cables in my system proved, once again, that cables are not mere peripherals, but critical components of an audio system. Not that I needed proof.

I baked them using the latest version of Audiodharma’s Cable Cooker, but that didn’t improve the TARAs’ sound. I drove a few hundred miles to visit a friend who, like me, owns Wilson Audio Specialties Alexandria XLF speakers, and installed the Omega Evolutions in his system. Same results. I returned the cables to TARA Labs and went back to using the Omega Golds.

In the meantime, TARA’s Matthew Bond had set about figuring out what had happened, and why. It wasn’t the Omega Evolutions’ design, he concluded, but rather an inductance mismatch with some speakers and electronics.¹ That led to his development of the higher-inductance Evolution SP, a variant of the original Evolution design that *did* produce in my system the promised audible improvements over the Omega Golds, including more precise note attacks from top to bottom, greater textural nuance, suppler and more precise bass, and a less mechanical sound overall

¹ Read Bond’s explanation at www.taralabs.com/making-sense-of/45-making-sense-of-evo-cable.

(skeptics: roll your eyes *here*).

I related this history to my visitor to emphasize that, in my experience, not every change to an audio system produces an improvement. To my amazement, he didn't tell me he had a plane to catch and run out the door.

When someone sends me \$500/pair or \$1000/pair speaker cables that perform as well as the hideously expensive models hanging around here, I'll be happy to buy them and use them. So far, that hasn't happened.

What's a Grecian urn?

Recently, I made a reference to Pentangle's extraordinary second album, *Sweet Child* (2 LPs, Transatlantic TRA 178), one disc of which was recorded in concert at London's Royal Festival Hall, which opened in 1951. Like Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall (now Avery Fisher Hall, soon to be David Geffen Hall), which opened 11 years later, the Royal Festival was among the first concert venues to be designed and built according to the principles of acoustic science (measurements), instead of the more fanciful and artistic ones (which often produced spectacular, unsurpassed sonics).

There were complaints about the Royal Festival from the beginning, and it was renovated in 1964 and 2007; many thought its original acoustic too dry, though it produced great clarity. In 2011, the conductor Sir Simon Rattle told a *Guardian* reporter that the acoustics were so "poor" (dry) that they made performers who played in the room "lose their will to live." Yikes! The Wikipedia page devoted to the Royal Festival Hall includes this: "It was known that the ancient Greeks had developed the technique of using vases built into their auditoria which added resonance to strengthen tone or improve its quality, though the effect was very weak."

That was news to me, but a Google search on "Greeks used vases to tune auditoriums" turned up confirmation in various historical sources. While the effects of such resonators in an auditorium might be "very weak," the results might well be more profound in a much smaller listening room.

It got me thinking about some of the "wacky" things many of us have seen attached to hotel-room walls during audio shows. Little brass cups are typical, and so are Synergistic

Research's HFTs: tiny, flared, horn-like aluminum "transducers," which I reported on in my February 2015 column. I'm still convinced they work as advertised; they're still stuck to my walls.

Though the term *ancient Greek backup* may have you visualizing the wrong thing, it was nice having that opinion confirmed—as happened during Tom Cruise's recent appearance on *The Tonight Show*, in which he gave a shout out to both Synergistic Research's room-tuning devices and Magico's speakers.² Not that I need Tom's validation, but how great was *that* for high-performance audio, vinyl, and Synergistic Research?

I feared blowback about my write-up of the Synergistic HFTs, but there was none. Instead, during visits to audiophiles throughout 2015, I found HFTs in various listening rooms, enthusiastically endorsed by their owners—who, if the HFTs had not worked as promised, could easily have taken advantage of Synergistic's money-back guarantee.

You knew this was coming . . .

Recently, Synergistic Research's Ted

**elusive
disc**

A Trusted Name Since 1989!

elusivedisc.com
For all your Hi-Fi needs!

What you can expect from us:

- Expert Cartridge Installation & Set Up.
- Excellent Customer Service.
- Speedy & Safe Delivery.
- Expert Help & Advice.



Music Hall USB-1 & MMF Series Turntables
All Music Hall Tables, Arms & Accessories Available!

FREE Power Supply with M2Tech DAC!



Buy the M2Tech Young PCM/DXD/DSD 128
DAC Preamp & get a FREE Van Der Graaf
4-Device Low Noise Sequential Power Supply!



Clearaudio Concept Turntable & Money-Saving Packages
Combos & All Clearaudio Tables Available!



Graham Phantom Elite & Phantom III Tonearms
Latest Evolution of the Multi-Award Winning Arm!



VPI Scout Multi-Award Winning Turntable
All VPI Tables, Arms & Dust Covers Available!

Denney visited me again, toting his latest products. One of them, the Atmosphere, extends the action of Synergistic's \$995 Active Frequency Equalizer (Active FEQ) box, which generates low-frequency radio-frequency (RF) pulses in an effort to counter the unwanted RF already present in the listening room. (This is also covered in my February 2015 column.) The Atmosphere takes this technology to a higher—or, if you prefer, more ridiculous—plane. It could be Denney's most audacious product yet.

Though rooted in science, the Atmosphere is based on some ideas that are wild even for Ted Denney. He was led to them by something he'd observed that I and maybe you, too, have noticed: His stereo sounds best late at night, and worst in the middle of the afternoon. In my expe-



**I feared blowback
about my write-up of
the Synergistic HFTs,
but there was none.**

Clockwise from above: Synergistic Research's Active FEQ; Atmosphere; and HFTs and ECTs: audacious products all!



rience, those phenomena are as consistently dependable as the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening. Denney surmised that human-generated and solar RF might be the culprits. If so—as explained in an article³ on Synergistic's website that also discusses “sudden ionospheric disturbance” (SID), “coronal holes,” and “sudden disappearing filaments” (SDF)—perhaps RF generated *within* a listening room could be “modeled and shaped to improve sound,” rather than degrade it.

Here's where I admit to being receptive to talk about the Schumann Resonance of 7.83Hz. Schumann Resonances are electromagnetic resonances, occurring at specific frequencies, with-

2 See www.nbc.com/the-tonight-show/video/tom-cruise-is-a-lowkey-audiophile-tech-nerd/2885989.

3 See www.synergisticresearch.com/new-product-atmosphere/.



Lyra MC Cartridges



Transfiguration, Grado & Air Tight Cartridges



TEAC & AudioQuest DragonFly USB DACs



AKG, Audeze, Audioquest, Grado & STAX Headphones & Headphone Amps



Clearaudio MC Cartridges



Clearaudio MM Cartridges

**MUST HAVE GEAR
& ACCESSORIES!**
Cartridge Trade-In &
Package Pricing Available!



Turntable Set-Up Tools & Must Have Accessories



Audience & AudioPrism Power Conditioning



SoundSmith Moving Iron Cartridges



Cartridge Man, Koetsu & Shelter Cartridges



Cayin & Sutherland Amps & Phono Stages



VPI, Spin Clean, Nitty Gritty & Audio Desk Systeme Record Cleaners & Money Saving Packages!

elusivedisc.com

Call Today! 800-782-3472

fax: 765-608-5341 Info: 765-608-5340 • 4020 frontage rd anderson, in 46013 • sales@elusivedisc.com • m-f 9-6 sat 11-3 est



Listen to Your Speakers In A New Way

Don't let your existing wired loudspeakers miss out on high-resolution streaming audio. Paradigm's new PW AMP delivers 200-Watts of Ultra Class-D power and lets you wirelessly stream high-resolution audio to existing loudspeakers over your home Wi-Fi network. Set-up is simple, app control is easy, and your options are unlimited. Go wireless, with Paradigm-level performance.

Exclusive **Anthem Room Correction (ARC*)** technology uses a digital microphone with advanced DSP algorithms to correct for room distortions in any space. You'll actually hear the difference ARC makes.

No other wireless streaming amplifier has ARC.



Wireless Freedom. Paradigm Performance. A Better Audio Experience.



Stream music to any Paradigm Premium Wireless Series product using your Android, PC or iOS device. Only Paradigm delivers wireless performance that is truly on par with traditional non-streaming audio systems.

PREMIUM
WIRELESS series



ANTHEM
ARC
Room Correction Technology

Paradigm
Visit paradigm.com for more info.

in the Earth's atmosphere, between the planet's surface and the ionosphere. The earth's atmosphere resonates at a fundamental frequency of 7.83Hz, as well as at a series of higher frequencies. The amount of resonating energy changes in proportion to the ionosphere's density, which itself depends on the amount of solar radiation striking it; the latter can also cause minuscule variations in the Schumann fundamental—which, because it's related to the dimensions of the cavity between the Earth and the ionosphere, otherwise remains constant at 7.83Hz.

We've been exposed to that frequency for hundreds of thousands of years. Only very recently have we been bombarded with all kinds of other frequencies, all human-made: radio, 60Hz electricity, cell phones, WiFi, you name it. The more we're bombarded, perhaps the crazier and more agitated we become.

This was explained to me in the 1980s, when I lived in Los Angeles. One day I visited the Society for Human Development, where I was put on a table that emitted low-frequency magnetic pulses at or around the Schumann fundamental. (Next time you see me, ask me why I was there; I don't have the space here to tell that story.) I got up off the table feeling only that I'd been ripped off for \$50. But that evening, exceptional, unusual, and beneficial thoughts, feelings, and energy surges overwhelmed me. Within a few weeks, the effect had dissipated.

From then until I left L.A., I visited the Society for Human Development monthly for a dose of concentrated low-frequency pulses. But before I moved, "Dr. Bob" made for me a pillow in which he'd embedded a very strong magnet. I've slept with this pillow for almost 30 years. In its presence I feel an overwhelming calm and sense of relaxation. Is it the power of suggestion? Who cares? My dogs, too, like it.

When Dr. Ted and his crew began experimenting in order to re-create the soothing, late-evening RF environment we all know and love, they found instead that extra-low-frequency (ELF) and super-low-frequency (SLF) generators, tuned to various frequencies and combinations thereof, could affect soundstage width, depth, and height, as well as shift the perceived frequency balance, especially in terms of low-frequency "stiffness."

The product that resulted from this

I admit to being receptive to talk about the Schumann Resonance of 7.83Hz.

research is the Atmosphere: a black tower, 3' 3" tall, that plugs into the wall, is controlled via Bluetooth, and costs \$2495. An iPad app downloadable from Synergistic controls the Atmosphere's output. Synergistic narrowed the ELF and SLF generators' output choices to two series of presets: Standard Scenes, which comprise Intimate Acoustic, Holographic, and Grand Canyon; and ATM Red Scenes: In My Listening Room, Expansive, Amplified, and Ethereal. The ATM Red Scenes (maybe you're thinking "an ATM where Ted withdraws the money deposited by the suckers who buy into this crap"...?) are made possible by placing between the speakers a small, cylindrical "tuning module," included in the price. For each Scene (represented on the app with relevant color photos), you can choose between two Advanced Settings: Air and Stratosphere.

Each preset is claimed to change the sound in specific ways. Intimate Acoustic, for when you want the performer in your room, is best for small-scale recordings. For live recordings or those with an abundance of added reverb, you're better off with Holographic. Grand Canyon is for large-scale recordings, whether acoustic (symphonic) or electric (eg, Roger Waters's *Amused to Death*). Or, if you so react, when you want to feel like an ass descending into the Grand Canyon of audiophile stupidity for buying into any of this nonsense.

Does the Atmosphere work? Sorry to say, yes—but in subtle ways that I found hardly profound. If your system isn't doing well, adding one won't fix it—but as icing on the cake, yes. I invited my wife downstairs into the listening room, sat her down, and, without telling her what I was doing with my iPad or pointing out the Atmosphere, I played a record, beginning in Intimate Acoustic mode. After a short while I switched to Grand Canyon mode and asked, "Did anything change?"

"The voice pushed farther back, toward the wall," she said, gesturing with one hand toward the wall behind the Alexandria XLFs. Which was what I'd heard.

I demonstrated the Atmosphere for some visiting audio manufacturers. As loath as they were to admit it, they heard the differences, too.

The Atmosphere is no game changer for a system, and Synergistic Research's Ted Denney is not Capt. James Tiberius Kirk. But if, as the announcer for the original *Star Trek* TV series intoned, space is the final frontier, then Denney is exploring strange new worlds of sound that some of you may wish to visit.

Stillpoints ESS Rack

The rack you set your equipment on can also make a difference in your system's sound, but this is another area in which skeptics run wild and audio enthusiasts dig in their heels.

"How can a rack affect the sound?"

"Well, have you listened?"

"I don't have to—I *know* it can't."

Isolating audio equipment from its environment is obviously beneficial, especially in the analog world, because it prevents outside vibrations from finding their way into the music signal. That's the premise behind Harmonic Resolution System's SXR racks, one of which I bought after reviewing them in my February 2009 column: The improvement in sound the SXR racks produced over my then-reference rack—a Pagode Master Reference from Finite Elemente—was obvious. The massive HRS bases sit on machined aluminum feet that contain rubber diaphragms to support the load; different diaphragm compliances are available, and the user selects the ones that are appropriate to the weight of the component being supported—thus tuning the base to an effectively low resonant frequency.

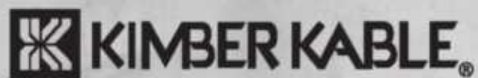
However, as we know, audio components—including electronics, whether solid-state or tubed—"chatter" with internally generated vibrational energy. The amounts of this chatter can be fairly gross (eg, from transformers) or minute (eg, when signals pass through even the smallest board-mounted components). But even microvibrations have been shown to affect, however minutely, the performance of passive electronic components. Which is why it's not enough to isolate components from only external vibrations.

The energy generated inside a component needs to be damped or drained away. Using aluminum plates and proprietary polymer discs, the products in HRS's Nimbus System—Nim-

AXIOS

HEADPHONE CABLE

ARE YOUR HEADPHONES WORTHY?
www.kimber.com/axios



ph: 801-621-5530 • fax: 801-627-6980 • www.kimber.com

bus Couplers, used with or without Nimbus Spacers, take the place of a component's feet, making direct contact between its bottom panel and the shelf below—combine mass, stiffness, and damping to transduce internal vibrational energy into heat.

The idea of dissipating energy from within audio components is also the basis for the Stillpoints company and their ceramic-ball technology. I've found Stillpoints' far-lower-mass solution to be more effective at draining internal vibrations, and more convenient to use.

Inside each of Stillpoints's various footers are layers of differently sized ceramic balls that are allowed a slight degree of movement horizontally, while being constrained within housings claimed to dissipate microvibrational energy by transducing it into heat. While Wilson Audio Specialties doesn't recommend the use of Stillpoints, I replaced the floor spikes supplied with my Alexandria XLF speakers with Stillpoints' massive Ultra 5 feet (\$699 each). There were definite improvements in bass clarity and in soundstage focus and stability. I'm not going back to the spikes.

Likewise, placing Stillpoints' smaller Ultra SS feet (\$249 each; the SS stands for "stainless steel") under electronic components produced equally salutary sonic effects. (Space limitations prevent me from going into placement and setup details.)

Stillpoints' ESS Rack attempts to both dissipate a component's own vibrational energy and isolate that component from external vibrations. It's available in three widths and three heights, with various shelf options. Each ESS Rack is built using two internally damped tubular columns and two threaded, internally tensioned, central tubular crossbars. The columns are fitted at both ends with pairs of wing-like metal arms. The arms at the bottom hold the footers that support the ESS Rack; stretched between the bottom and top arms are vertical steel cables, to which the hefty shelf-supporting crossbars are clamped: The pre-tensioned cables serve to isolate the shelves from each other. The spacing of the shelves is easily varied to fit components of almost any height, and though it might not look like it, each shelf can support thousands of pounds.

Stillpoints offers four types of shelf. I was sent an ESS Rack with four shelves that featured the company's



The energy generated inside a component needs to be damped or drained away.

$\frac{3}{4}$ " solid stainless-steel shelf-support crossbars, to which a top shelf of 1"-thick acrylic (optional; a thickness of $\frac{3}{4}$ " is standard) was attached via six Stillpoints resonance-control devices: three evenly spaced across each of the two solid crossbars.

The three other shelves weren't shelves at all, in any usual sense; instead, they were skeletal constructions comprising two Xes of stainless steel coupled to the crossbars with six Stillpoints devices: Two threaded holes in each arm of each X, for a total of 16 holes per shelf, accept the head of a Stillpoints Ultra-Mini coupler. Screw four of these into the grid arms, at whichever holes are best positioned for the component the Ultra Minis are to support. This low-mass design, intended to quickly and efficiently dissipate energy, is similar to the thinking embodied in Rega Research's current ultra-low-mass turntables.

The ESS Rack combines isolation from and control of vibrations in one ingenious and, I think, extremely attractive package. But it's expensive: Prices start at \$8620 for the smallest ESS, with three basic acrylic shelves. It seems to me that solid acrylic shelves are at odds with the ESS Rack's skeletal design concept—but after all, if you have a turntable (and if you're reading this column, surely you do), a shelfless top level won't always be practical—and where do you put such necessary accessories as record brushes, clamps, and stylus cleaners? And while the ESS's X-shelves might not be ideal for every component you own or might

someday buy, I'd still save up for them rather than opt for all acrylic shelves.

Unfortunately, I couldn't directly compare the ESS and HRS racks—there were too many variables, and moving one or both racks was impossible. However, tapping the plinth of the turntable placed on the ESS's acrylic top shelf while the stylus sat in the groove of an LP effectively demonstrated the complete isolation between the top and lower shelves.

I was, however, able to move a turntable (a Wilson Benesch Full Circle with ACT 0.5 tonearm) and phono preamplifier (Pure Audio Vinyl) from the ESS Rack to my Finite Element Pagode rack (\$6195 when new), which is my reference rack for the system in my utility room that I use for most of the record reviews I write for AnalogPlanet.com. The Pagode includes carefully tuned resonators fitted into the frame of each of its shelves. It's a good rack—and, with its maple shelves and brushed-aluminum risers, it's beautiful, stylish, and a shame to keep in a utility room. But it's sonically not in the league of the HRS or the ESS, both of which helped my system produce noticeably "blackier" backgrounds, more nimble bass, and more precise transients—and, thus, far greater transparency. I didn't have to strain to hear the differences between the same gear on the ESS and Pagode racks. As ISIS audio fanatics would say, "veils were lifted." ■

Michael Fremer (fremer@analogplanet.com) is the editor of AnalogPlanet.com, a website devoted to all things analogical.

CONTACTS

Stillpoints

573 County Road A, Suite 103
Hudson, WI 54016
Tel: (651) 204-0605
Web: www.stillpoints.us

Synergistic Research

17401 Armstrong Avenue, Suite 102
Irvine, CA 92614
Tel: (800) 578-6489,
(949) 476-0000
Web: www.synergisticresearch.com

TARA Labs, Inc.

550 Clover Lane
Ashland, OR 97520
Tel: (541) 488-6465
Fax: (541) 488-6463
Web: www.taralabs.com

Telefunken 6922/E88CC
 Made in Ulm, Germany in 1968, these are the
 most sought after and rarest 6922 type ever.
 An incredible upgrade to your gear. Find a
 HUGE inventory of vintage tubes only at:
www.upscaleaudio.com



MANLEY
 Chinook Phono
 in Stock

PRIMALUNA DiaLogue Premium
 Integrated Amp in Stock

SONUS FABER
 Venere
 in Stock



AUDEZE
 LCD-3



VPI
 HRX in Stock

NOLA
 KO in Stock

Upscale Audio is always on the hunt for new products. Check our website for the latest.

IN STOCK: ACOUSTIC ZEN, AES, AHI TJOEB, ANTHEM, ARCAM, ATMA-SPHERE, AUDEZE, AUDIO QUEST, B&K, BEL CANTO, NZ MICRO, CARY, CHANG LIGHTSPEED, CLEARAUDIO, COINCIDENT, DH LABS, DYNVECTOR, ERA, EQUI-TECH, EXACTPOWER, GALLO, GRAHAM, JL AUDIO, KIMBER KABLE, LYRA, MAGNUM DYNALAB, MANLEY, MARTIN LOGAN, MUSIC HALL, MYSTÈRE, NITTY GRITTY, NOLA, NORDOST, NOTTINGHAM, OPERA, PATHOS, PEACHTREE, PRIMALUNA, PRIMARE, PS AUDIO, QUAD, REGA, REL, SME, SOOLOOS, SONUS FABER, SUTHERLAND, TRI-PLANAR, VPI, VINCENT, AND VIENNA ACOUSTICS

UPSCALE
AUDIO
 HIGH FIDELITY • MUSICAL SYSTEMS

www.upscaleaudio.com

2504 Spring Terrace • Upland, CA 91784
 (909) 931-9686 FAX: (909) 985-6968

LISTENING BY ART DUDLEY

THIS ISSUE: The Decca-derived, positive-scanning London Maroon cartridge is taken for a spin.

Marooned!

Just as John Atkinson has a special telephone on his desk, by means of which the late J. Gordon Holt expresses his displeasure at this magazine's continuing decline into latitudinarianism, my own desk is littered with a dozen or so windup timers, each set to remind me how long it's been since I last wrote about this or that hi-fi eccentricity. Each timer has its own distinctive ring: The one labeled "LOWTHER" is a bit shrill, especially at certain humidity levels, while the one marked "QUAD ESL" can be heard to best advantage only when sitting in a particular spot—and even I have to admit that my "CARTRIDGE ALIGNMENT" timer seems to go off rather too often.

Last week, a moment of reverie was interrupted by the ringing of a bell I hadn't heard in a while: "DECCA CARTRIDGE." I stopped doing what I was doing—which, as suggested, was nothing—and got on the phone to Brian Tucker, of Pro Audio, Ltd., US distributor for London Cartridges, the trade name under which the present-day licensees of the original Decca cartridge design do business.

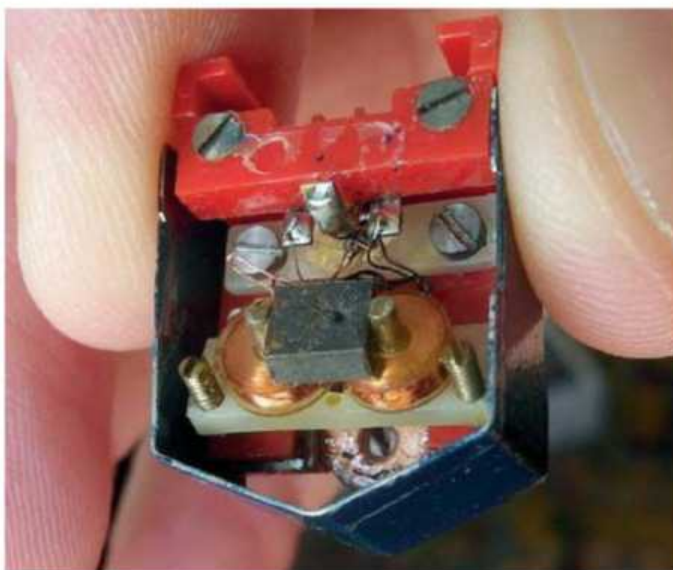
All right: I lied about the timers. (I did *not* lie about JA's red telephone.) What really happened was that I visited my friend George, to help him sort out his record player. George had, for a while, lost the use of his right arm, and was unable to cue records without risking and occasionally causing severe damage to his cartridge. In the space of just over a month, two good cartridges had fallen victim, and now George was down to the last three working cartridges in his stable, all of them Deccas.

As it turned out, only one of the three was functional. I installed it on George's Rega Research RB300 tonearm, itself mated to a nice old Rega Planar 3 turntable. I couldn't recall if I'd ever before put a Decca cartridge in a Rega arm; for his part, George didn't recall which, if any, of his tonearms would best suit the semi-low-compliance Decca (see below). We didn't know what to expect. But I was knocked out: I knew well the sound of George's system, in which tube electronics drive a late-1980s pair of Quad ESL-63 electrostatic loudspeakers, and I'd never heard it produce anywhere near this level of touch and force and dynamism and sheer pep. Neither had George.

That was when I went home and called Brian Tucker.

Three goes into two

The seminal single-channel Decca phono pickup, which first appeared around 1958, is a moving-iron type: It traces the record groove with a stylus attached to an armature—L-shaped, in this case—made of magnetically permeable metal, the latter held within 1mm of a stationary coil, adjacent to which are two tiny, flat magnets, also stationary; the movement of the iron-like armature modulates the current



A Decca/London stereo cartridge is a mono design modified to enable stereo playback.

induced by the magnet's flux lines, creating an electrical analog of the modulations in the groove.

The engineers in the Special Products division of Britain's greatest record company must have been pleased with their creation: That same design endures,

virtually unchanged, to this day. But it endures as a *stereo* pickup—and that's a bit of an odd duck.

Throughout the phono-pickup industry of the late 1950s and beyond, almost all stereo cartridges have been designed with two separate, identical generators, of whatever technology, driven by a common stylus and compliantly mounted cantilever. Those elements were, and still are, constructed so that each generator responds to modulations on opposite walls of a V-shaped groove, each wall being at a 45° angle to the record's surface, and thus at a 90° angle to each other (*ie*, their relationship is orthogonal). That's stereo phonography in a nutshell.

But a Decca/London stereo cartridge is, in fact, a mono cartridge design modified to enable stereo playback. It has *three* coils: the coil that was part of the design all along, for turning purely lateral groove modulations into a signal, and two more coils added later, to produce a signal from only vertical motions of the stylus.

Getting stereo out of such a thing is tricky: On the one hand, the lateral coil produces a signal that is the sum of the electrical representations of both left and right channels: L plus R. On the other hand, reading a 45°+45° groove with a purely vertical generator produces a signal that represents the *difference between* the electrical representations of the

left- and right-channel groove walls: L minus R.

The engineers at Decca Special Products took note of a simple mathematical relationship: By adding to the L+R signal the L-R signal, they wound up with 2L, which they directed to the cartridge's left-channel output pin. By subtracting, by means of antiphase, the L-R signal from the L+R signal, they produced 2R, which went to the right-channel output pin. Thus, by means of sum-and-difference wiring, Decca produced a two-channel signal from a three-coil cartridge.¹

Clever though Decca's solution surely was, one can't help noting a couple of departures from perfection. For one thing, in the lateral generator of the Decca stereo cartridge, the coil is almost at the level of the groove—it nearly touches the record's surface—and the vertical leg of that L-shaped armature passes through its center: an ideal set of conditions. The vertical-plane generator of the Decca stereo cartridge doesn't match that ideal: It uses pole-pieces that straddle, rather than coils that surround, the lateral portion of the armature. (Thus, the Decca's vertical generator has slightly more in common

with a variable-reluctance cartridge, which is a different animal altogether; in its lateral generator, the Decca is a purely moving-iron type.)

The other noteworthy idiosyncrasy of the Decca stereo cartridge derives from the mechanical rather than electrical differences between its two generators: Its stylus-armature assembly can move either laterally, which involves some degree of torsional bending, or straight up and down, but it is considerably less compliant in the vertical plane, thanks in part to Decca's use of a piece of very fine thread looped around the stylus shank and held taut, to restrain the armature's movement. (At first glance, that filament resembles a traditional cantilever, and is sometimes mistaken for same by newcomers to the breed.) One consequence is that the Decca cartridge exhibits different vertical and lateral resonant frequencies—meaning, among other things, that not every tonearm will mate perfectly with this distinctive little pickup.

The iron age

Never mind all that. The big thing about a Decca cartridge—probably the

best, most revolutionary thing—is its lack of a traditional cantilever.

We've been taught that a magnetic cartridge generates electricity in proportion to the mechanical movement of its stylus, as it follows the modulations in a record groove. But the real story isn't quite so simple, owing to the length of its cantilever: a lever whose fulcrum is not at the midpoint of its length, but much nearer the generator than the stylus. The obvious consequence is that very large stylus excursions result in very small generator excursions, thus potentially compressing the recorded signal. Which ain't good.

The Decca cartridge does indeed have a cantilever—if by *cantilever* one means *the thingie that goes between the stylus and the generator*—but it imposes no fulcrum between those two elements:

¹ If I understand correctly, the great Alan D. Blumlein—who, in 1933, was awarded the first patent in the field of two-channel phonography—described a sum-and-difference disc-cutting system as the basis for his "binaural" format. A few years later, Arthur Keller, of Bell Labs, noted the qualitative differences between vertical and lateral cuts, and opted for a purely 45°+45° approach to both mastering and playback. In 1958, when Westrex came out with the first commercially practical stereo-LP technology, they based it on Keller's system.

THE CABLE COMPANY Presents

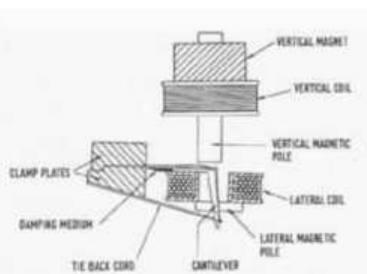
VIVIFICATE



Rejuvenate your vinyl from TheCableCo.com

A stylus excursion of, say, $1\mu\text{m}$ causes the moving armature in a Decca's generator to undergo a $1\mu\text{m}$ excursion. This aspect of their cartridge's performance was referred to by Decca Special Products as *positive scanning*, and they claimed that it resulted in a transducer that imposes far less dynamic compression than any other.

To test that claim, I asked Brian Tucker to loan me a current-production sample from London Cartridges—whose production chief, John Wright, was an engineer for Decca Special Products until 1989, when he bought the rights to manufacture the cartridges in his own facility in Shropshire. (Over a quarter-century later, the health-conscious Wright is still going strong: When he's not busy working as a hockey umpire, he does all of the manufacturing and repairing, while colleague Brian Smith, of Presence Audio in West Sussex, handles worldwide distribution and sales.) We settled on the London Maroon (\$950), partly because it's the entry-level London, and partly because it's fitted with a spherical stylus tip, which I tend to prefer. (Most of the five other models in the London line, which range in price up



This tiny little cartridge embodies the greatest conundrum in perfectionist audio.

to \$5000, are fitted with elliptical or hyperelliptical styli.)

When my loaner London Maroon arrived, I set about comparing its design with that of an original Decca I have on hand—a nonfunctioning Decca Blue (see photo on p.35) given me by the temporarily one-armed George. (I also accepted from George his similarly doornail-like Decca Gray and left it with The Soundsmith's Peter Ledermann, hoping it can be repaired.) The



experience was like climbing a steep cliff and discovering, at the top, one of those plateaus where dinosaurs still live: Time had apparently stood still for these cartridges, which appeared identical. They had precisely the same dimensions, and appeared to be made of precisely the same materials—a light-gauge metal (tin?) for some parts, a distinctively old-style bright-red plastic (polystyrene?) for others. The only differences were that the London's coil looked neater and better made, and that the unfathomable numbers at the output-pin end of its red plastic housing were written in ink. (On the original Deccas, the writing resembles dried mud.)

Revive your sound, try at home with our...

...Headphone, Components and Cable Lending Library.

Cables



Kimber Cables
PK14 Palladian PowerKord

Headphones



Chord Electronics
Hugo

Analog



Audio Desk Systeme
Vinyl Cleaner



Bring your system BACK TO LIFE!

Take your system to the next level with access to over \$3 million worth of products in our Cable Library. Evaluate over 60 brands of cable, plus headphones, components, line conditioners and more at home. Let us help - free system consult with our expert audiophiles. Call us at:

800-328-9973

Power Line



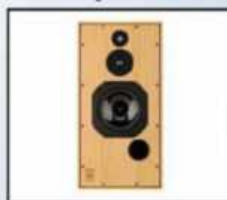
Audience
Adept Response aR6

Acoustics/Resonance



Cathedral Sound
Acoustic Panels

Components



Harbeth Loudspeakers
Super HLS



INVOLVING
NATURALLY CLEAR
SPACIOUS AND AIRY
TONALLY SUBSTANTIAL
OPEN, ARTICULATE, CORRECT
CLEAR, PHYSICAL AND PRESENT
BELIEVABLE SENSES OF BODY AND BITE
CLEARER SENSE OF THE PERFORMING SPACE
NEVER, EVER BRIGHT: THEY WERE JUST RIGHT
COMMUNICATED THE SENSE OF STRUCTURE AND FLOW
ALL THE MORE DESERVING OF ITS STATUS AS A REFERENCE
PRICE QUITE REASONABLE FOR ALL THE SP100R2 HAS TO OFFER
SURPRISINGLY CONSISTENT
EXTREMELY ACCOMPLISHED
SUPERB
AWESOME
SCREAMINGLY, TEARILY GOOD
JUST AS RECOMMENDABLE, IF NOT MORE SO
A STRONGER RECOMMENDATION DOES NOT EXIST

MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM SPENDOR

Above adjectives all taken from Stereophile's review of Spondor SP100R2.

It's time for Spondor.

SPENDOR

Brooks Berdan
Los Angeles, CA
626-359-9131

Gene Rubin Audio
Ventura, CA
805-340-2270

Stereotypes Audio
Portland, OR
503-280-0910

Sound by Singer
New York, NY
212-924-8600

Audio Perfection
Minneapolis, MN
612-866-0083

Wilson Audio
New Orleans, LA
504-888-8851

Installing a London cartridge requires a procedure unlike that for virtually any other cartridge, since its antecedent was designed for quick, easy mechanical and electrical attachment to the headshell of a proprietary Decca tonearm. Londons come with a plastic mounting bracket in the above-described red, made with a pair of threaded holes of the size and spacing needed for standard cartridge-mount screws. A recess at the rear of the cartridge snugs on to said bracket, which also translates the cartridge's three electrical contacts—the ground is common to both channels—into the usual four output pins. Though fans of making things “Linn-tight” are unlikely to be satisfied, I was perfectly pleased with this arrangement, which also adds much-needed distance between the tonearm's headshell and the decidedly non-tall (or short, or shallow, or however you want to say it) body of the London/Decca.

A final setup note: Neither its very low stance—itsself a consequence of being cantileverless—nor its width make the London very easy to align, which makes the choice of a nonfussy spherical stylus seem all the wiser. Just sayin'.

With slight reluctance

The London Maroon had a point of view. It stressed detail, presence, touch, and texture. With any device so blessed, the temptation is to give it a steady stream of recordings that promise greater-than-average tactile delights—and up to a point, I did just that. I wanted to hear the tactile qualities of all the wonderfully weird renaissance instruments on Musica Antiqua Vienna's *Le Jardin Musical* (Supraphon 1 11 2126), and the rattle of loosely strung guitars on *Memphis Swamp Jam*, by Bukka White, Sleepy John Estes, *et al* (Blue Thumb BTS 6000), and the multihued thwack of the tabla on Ravi Shankar's *Improvisations* (World Pacific 1416). With those and other LPs, the Maroon did not disappoint: Its sound was impactful, sometimes startlingly so, and often downright breathtaking.

But in the long run, the greater pleasures came from simply playing whatever I felt like playing, and hearing the sonic and musical surprises the London Maroon found in grooves I'd thought I knew. It was a treat to play the recording, by Paul Tortelier with Sir Adrian Boult and the London Philharmonic, of Elgar's Cello Concerto (EMI ASD 2906), and not only enjoy

the tightly controlled force with which Tortelier approaches some note attacks, but also to hear more clearly than ever the distinction between the sustained F-sharp he plays at the end of a 10-note run, and the same note picked up, softly, by the massed cellos behind him. Even Elgar's subtler Introduction and Allegro for Strings, on the album's flip side, gave up new secrets: a pizzicato note here, bowing techniques there, and so forth.

And I had a pleasant reunion with *June 1, 1974* (Island ILPS 9291), which documents a Kevin Ayers concert in which the headliner's special guests came close to stealing the show, none more so than Brian Eno. Eno's “Driving Me Backwards,” which opens the album, has Robert Wyatt on percussion, Archie Leggett and Ayers both playing electric bass, John Cale on electric viola, and various keyboard instruments supporting Eno's synthesizer. Through the London Maroon, the two basses were distinct from one another, yet appropriately forceful when playing in unison on the downbeats—and the attack components of Cale's viola notes were particularly tactile, adding to this performance's very appropriate *drive*. Indeed, the whole album sounded wonderful: This cartridge found a whole new level of excitement, impact, and sheer fun in a record I'd thought I already knew.

I wondered: Would a stereo cartridge based this heavily on a single-channel design do a better-than-average job of playing mono records?

Yes and no, with an emphasis on yes. On the one hand, the London Maroon didn't ignore surface noise in the manner of a true mono cartridge: It didn't accentuate the ticks and pops of grooves that are contaminated with the baked-in badness of decades-old dirt or just plain worn, but it didn't shy from putting them across.

On the other hand, the Maroon was far better than most stereo cartridges I've heard at putting across the real dynamic juice of a good mono LP from the 1950s or '60s—such as Sonny Rollins's *Tenor Madness* (Prestige LP 7047). On that record's “Paul's Pal,” Paul Chambers's double bass was brisk, agile, and tuneful, while “Philly” Joe Jones's brushed snare had the right snap and impact, and Sonny's tenor sax was richly textured and consistently engaging: a constant stream of nuance and melodic brilliance.

The London Maroon brought to

every record I played, stereo or mono, a consistent sound—one in which the midrange was, for lack of a better word, *illuminated*. There was nothing bright about this cartridge's sound, yet midrange detail and midrange texture always grabbed my attention before anything else. And that was fine by me. The Maroon's treble seemed in good, natural balance with the rest of its range; I never felt I was missing anything in the way of air or sparkle, neither was I troubled by the sort of distracting zizziness I hear from some modern cartridges. The Maroon's bass range was dry and tight, and occasionally left me wanting just a little more. Then again, when compared with my EMT OFD-series mono pickups and their admittedly generous bottom ends, most other pickups can't help sounding a bit lean. To some extent, I suppose, my system is tuned with the EMTs in mind—speaking of which, owing to the London's high DC resistance of 2k ohms per channel and its similarly high output of 5mV, I sent its output straight into the moving-magnet inputs of the Shindo Auriges phono stage, without using a step-up transformer. (Remember, those mathematical formulae promise not just L and R, but 2L and 2R.)

And I think that I have yet to find the most compatible tonearm for the London (or maybe I have, and it was the medium-mass Rega RB300 back in George's apartment). I say that because, when measuring the Maroon with the *Hi-Fi News & Record Review Test Record* (Hi-Fi News HFN 001, which is precisely the catalog number I'd have chosen for it), neither my EMT 997 arm nor my review loaner of the Abis SA-1.2B seemed ideal. With the Abis-London combination, the lateral-resonance level peaked at 12–14Hz, the vertical resonance at 5–7Hz. The latter is too low for comfort—and, throughout the entirety of the lateral tests, the cartridge was a little wobbly. Still, that was better than the EMT-London combo: Lateral behavior was nearly identical to what I saw with the Abis, but a 9Hz vertical resonance was so severe that the stylus wouldn't stay in the groove; instead, it did a most disconcerting Woody Woodpecker kind of thing. I was done with testing for the day.

And remember . . .

A cartridge's ability to track records under everyday conditions, while vul-



ARABESQUE
miniSSIMO



"This important speaker deserves the highest recommendation."

Alan Sircom, Hifi + December 2014

"the Minissimos combine so many virtues– sweet sound, ease of use, gorgeous looks, a diminutive presence – that it's impossible not to smile when you see and hear them...".

Ken Kessler, Hifi News April 2015

"A small speaker that plays big."

Andrew Quint, The Absolute Sound October 2015



For more information about Crystal Cable's highend cables and the Arabesque loudspeaker range visit:
www.crystalcable.com www.facebook.com/CrystalCable.IAH

Distributed in the USA by Audio Plus Services 800.663.9353 www.audioplusservices.com
Distributed in Canada by Plurison 866.271.5689 www.plurison.com

nerable to the effects of arm-matching described above, is something else altogether. With the London back in the Abis SA-1.2B arm, which I suppose it preferred by a slight margin, I used good ol' HFN 001 to assess just that, beginning at the manufacturer-recommended vertical tracking force (VTF) of 1.8gm and eventually working up to 2gm. At the latter force, I discovered a level of tracking performance that was fair but acceptable—especially acceptable when optimized by adjusting the antiskating while listening. (Previous to this, I suppose I was insensitive to the appeal of adjusting bias on the fly.)

The prospective London Maroon owner should also note that a positive-scanning cartridge such as this *feels* different in use, noticeable in the lack of compliance with which it settles into the lead-in groove. Simply put, cueing records with a stiff-feeling Decca or London cartridge takes some getting used to. A positive-scanning cartridge can also be more easily tripped up by record warps great or small, for the same reason that cars without shock absorbers can, at speed, have trouble keeping all four tires on uneven pavement. And the Maroon's

lack of compliance between stylus and generator accounts for yet another idiosyncrasy: Deccas and Londons are somewhat microphonic, and may transmit through your system the noises you didn't know your tonearm makes when it's being lifted away from and returned to its rest.²

Idiosyncratic? Inarguably. And thus this tiny little cartridge embodies the greatest conundrum in perfectionist audio, one found at the heart of so many exceptional products: It sets out to excel in a truly vital aspect of playback, and in doing so pays a bit less attention to aspects of lesser importance. Technologically conservative audiophiles (a friendlier way of saying "nerdy twits") would have us believe that the Decca produces more distortion than do more conventional cartridges, but that's not true: The Decca offers a different balance of the many distortions with which we all must contend—and it may well distort less overall.

Compared to the London Maroon, most moving-coil cartridges—with the exceptions of very early Ortofons and the similarly early EMTs they inspired—sound compressed. Those

distinctions will be important to some hobbyists, considerably less so to others, and that's all well and good. We remain free to choose the distortions of least personal significance in order to revel in the strengths that matter most: a reasonable price to pay. ■

Art Dudley (art.dudley@sorc.com) listens to the sounds of his tonearms in wintery upstate New York.

2 And if your tonearm makes noises during normal record play, which it surely should not, I suppose you'll hear those, too.

CONTACTS

London Cartridges

c/o Presence Audio
Overdale, Haglands Lane
West Chiltington, Pulborough
West Sussex RH20 2QR
England, UK
Tel: (44) (0)1798-813133
Web: www.presenceaudio.com

US distributor: Pro Audio Ltd.
111 N. South Drive
Tower Lakes, IL 60010
Tel: (847) 526-1660
E-mail: proaudio@comcast.net

Introducing the revolutionary new Pharaoh...

It's good to be King!



The all new Pharaoh hybrid integrated amplifier from Rogue Audio

175 WPC • MM/MC phono pre-amp • discrete tube headphone amp • home theater bypass • Pure Rogue...only \$3,495

Rogue Audio, Inc. • Brodheadsville, PA • 570-992-9901 • www.rogueaudio.com

AudioVision

san francisco

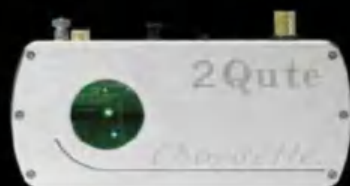
welcome to the hifi show



on the cutting edge
of DAC technology from
their New Affordable 2Qute to
their New Reference Desktop Hugo TT !



Hugo TT
Desktop Reference DAC with Reference Headphone Amp



2Qute
New Compact Affordable DAC

Come to our **Special Free In-Store Event**
(Dec 3rd) 7:30-11pm "From Digital to Analog"
and meet Robert Watts

the chief designer of CHORD DAC's
Hosted by Jeff Dorgay from TONEAudio
with Devialet, Janzen, Nordost, Octave,
Dr Feickert, E.A.T., Aria and Lumin

1628 california st. (on the cable car line)
san francisco, california 94109

www.audiovisionsf.com

abyss
audio physic
dali
davone
dynaudio
gallo
grado
hifiman
janzen electrostatic
jl audio
kef
kingsound
mrspeakers
nola
psb
raidho
rel acoustics
triangle
ultrasone
arcam
aria
astell & kern
audioquest
bel canto
b.m.c.
burson
cambridge
cardas
cary audio
chord electronics
clearaudio
crystal cable
devialet
dr. feickert
e.a.t.
funk firm
h.r.s.
ifi
integra
kiseki
lumin
lyngdorf audio
lyra
marantz
margules
micromega
moon by simaudio
naim audio
nordost
octave
pear audio
pono
primaluna
pro-ject
ps audio
quadraspire
rega
sonos
soundsmith
stillpoints
unison research
woo audio

GRAMOPHONE DREAMS

BY HERBERT REICHERT

THIS ISSUE: Herb listens to high-end headphones from AudioQuest and Audeze.

Personal Listening

The golden rays pouring in through the left oculus transport a tiny child carrying a cross: "... the devil was vanquished, as if he had just swallowed the bait in the mousetrap." In his essay "Muscipula Diaboli," The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece," the late art historian Meyer Schapiro explains how every object, every surface—even the smoke, light, and volume of space—depicted in the famous triptych by Robert Campin (ca 1375–1444) is a coded symbol explicating the mystical underpinnings of Netherlandish Protestantism.¹

The painting, now in the Cloisters of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, shows how a 15th-century Dutch fabric merchant—which describes the donor who commissioned this painting—might have imagined the Annunciation. This image was the beginning of a radical new art that would be valued more for its ability to represent philosophical or metaphysical concepts and crystalized thought than for any amount of craft or skill. The painting's main purpose was, as Schapiro's put it, to help churchgoers "picture in their minds ... a long ago, far away, mystical event."

The central panel (top) shows the inside of a small Dutch living room in which the archangel Gabriel is about to announce to Mary that she will be the mother of Christ. The room has two rectangular windows, and two oculi—circular or oval windows—that represent human eyes. The room itself symbolizes the interior of the skull of the kneeling male donor in the left panel.

The altarpiece represents a sudden shift in the nature of painted representation, from the didactic, two-dimensional, illusionary "space" of all European painting up to that point, to a dynamic, three-dimensional allegory of the workings and imaginings crystalized inside the viewer's—and patron's—minds.

This early-renaissance paradigm shift is still an important part of our culture. Thinking, reading books, and, especially, listening to music—all require our personal awareness of this aforementioned "inner-skull" space. As we listen to recorded music, what we feel stimulates the production of images, and those images connect us with events long past. (Which is precisely why I hold stereo imaging in such high regard.)

When I lie on the bed in my darkened monk's cell, listening through headphones to a recording of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, I experience that same form of crystalized thought—directly between my ears. The space inside my skull becomes the nave of St. Thomas Church, in Leipzig, and I contemplate the mystical underpinnings of the Protestant Reformation. If you can imagine the beauty



Top: the Mérode Altarpiece.
Bottom: the nave of St. Thomas in Leipzig.

As we listen to recorded music, what we feel stimulates the production of images, and those images connect us with events long past.

of this connectedness, then you are ready to explore the intimacy, power, and glory of great music experienced via great ear speakers.

The Guttenberg Bible

Steve Guttenberg, who writes for CNET and our sister magazine *Sound & Vision*, is my audio-reviewing runnin' buddy. He got me into headphones. He kept nagging me: "I know you, Herb. You're going to really like the way headphones connect you with the music." I showed him my Koss Porta Pros and Grado SE60s. He didn't give up. He loaned me a pair of over-ear Audio-Technica ATH-M50s and advised me to take my time, focus my mind, and listen patiently.

I looked up the ATH-M50s on the Internet and read all the reviews. Since then, I've been doing my homework: reading Tyll Herstens's writings at *Stereophile's* sister website InnerFidelity.com and Guttenberg's own Audiophiliac blog at CNET.com. I've been borrowing a lot of headphones and listening at least an hour a day, comparing Steve's and Tyll's reviews against my own impressions. Here's what I've learned from these two major, full-time, professional headphone gurus: The last thing the world needs is another wise-ass pontificator (like me) babbling to the masses about which headphones are the best and which they should buy.

¹ Reprinted in Meyer Schapiro, *Late Antique, Early Christian, and Medieval Art: Selected Papers, Vol. 3* (New York: George Braziller, 1993).



"Simply the finest loudspeaker
I've had the privilege of
hearing. The Legacy Aeris
2015 Product of the Year."

J. Darby, Stereo Mojo

"...without question one of the great
values in high-end audio."

R. Youman, Positive Feedback

"Once you've heard how good
it can be, it's hard to go
back...it's the difference be-
tween listening to a recording,
and being there."

D. Upton, Home Theater Shack

AXPONA Chicago
April 15-17, 2016
Westin O'Hare
Madison Room

"...outstanding performance at every frequency to the limits
of hearing and beyond, excellent definition, outstanding
dynamics..." *A. Cordesman, The Absolute Sound 235*

"I was hearing each instrument, voice and subtle nuance come through with all their
attendant nuances and inflections." *F. Alles, Stereo Times*

"Legacy gives you real quality, technology, innovation and value when it comes to fine
high end speakers." *J. Clements, Secrets of Home Theater*



For a catalog, price list or your nearest dealer location:

legacyaudio.com 800-283-4644 info@legacyaudio.com

AUDEZE EL-8 OPEN-BACK HEADPHONES

After Audio-Technica's ATH-M50x headphones (\$239)—the well-balanced, musically involving, and extremely comfortable 'phones to which I recently upgraded from those ATH-M50s—the next audiophile-quality headphones I spent time with were Audeze's LCD-2 open-back model. Their rich, solid musicality was beyond what I'd imagined headphones could achieve. The LCD-2s' detail, momentum, and unabashed beauty of sound took me inside the music, and revealed to me the exact words each singer was singing and each songwriter had written. The bass let me feel the music in my bones. The extreme high quality of the LCD-2s cured my ADD and committed me to the benefits of lying in bed and listening in the dark. With headphones, you're always in the sweet spot.

The LCD-2s showed me something else: Headphones are the same as loudspeakers—except that they're designed to be experienced in the listener's extreme nearfield. I've always preferred listening to my Quad ESLs and Falcon LS3/5a speakers very close up—say, from a distance of 3' to 7'. Sitting so close minimizes room colorations and intensifies the energy field, making instruments and voices extraclear and physically tangible. Listening to ear speakers is a natural extension of that practice.

Soon, I got lucky again, and began spending nights with Audeze's new LCD-X open-back 'phones. The 'Xes reproduced reverberating hall sounds, giant pipe organs, and massed voices with a crystalline beauty that turned the inside of my skull into the nave of a cathedral.

Then, last January, at the 2015 Consumer Electronics Show, I entered Audeze's room, where I encountered former *Stereophile* fabulist and current public-relations person extraordinaire Jonathan Scull. He smiled like a naughty Frenchman. "Herb, I hear you're into headphones. Try these!" He handed me a pair of Audeze's new EL-8 open-back model and turned up the volume on the Burson Virtuoso Conductor DAC-headphone amplifier (\$1995).

Within 30 seconds, I was thinking, *These 'phones seem more transparent, detailed,*



The Audeze EL-8s are made in the US.

and open than the LCD-2s or the LCD-Xes. Within minutes, I was thinking how much lighter (420gm *vs* the LCD-Xes' 600gm) and more comfortable (than the LCD-2s) the EL-8s felt. I asked the price. J-10 smiled again. "\$699!"

I mumbled something and started switching tracks on the music server. Then I plugged the EL-8s into my iPhone and listened to "Raga Basant Mukhari with Jogia: Gat in Jhap Tala & Teen Tala," from Ali Akbar Khan's *Artistic Sound of Sarod* (CD, Chhanda Dhara SNCD 3386). This recording sounded stronger, faster, punchier, and more transparent than it ever had—even through my big floorstanders. "Jonathan! I need to write about these. What do you think?" Again he flashed that naughty *I have a dirty secret* smile.

Unlike my LCD-2, the LCD-X—

and all of the newest Audeze models, including the EL-8—come equipped with a Fazor apparatus attached to the twin magnet structures.² Audeze claims that the Fazor guides and manages the movement of sound pressures around the dense magnet grids, thus creating a more symmetrical acoustic load on the diaphragm; theoretically, this should improve the phase and impulse responses, especially at high frequencies. To my ears, the Fazor-equipped models sound more airy and transparent, but less weighty and punchy than the non-Fazor models.

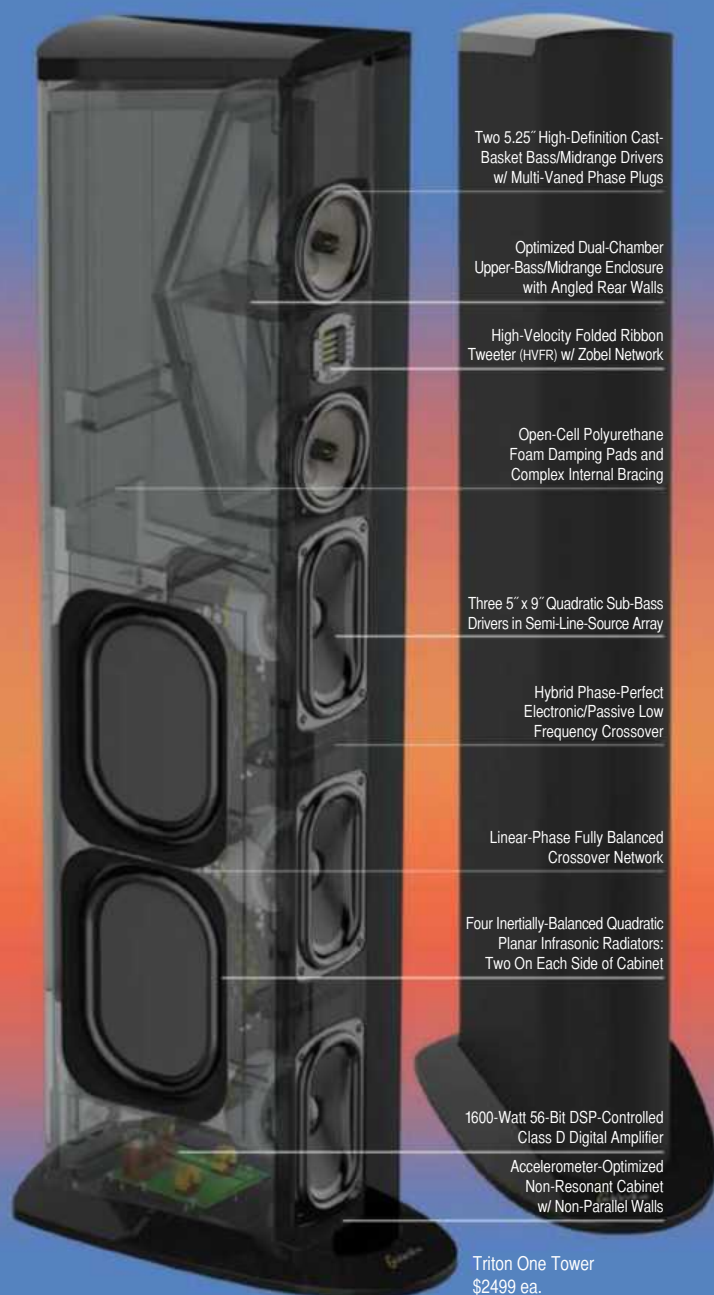
The Audeze EL-8s are made in the US, and are available in closed- and open-back models. I report here on the open-back version, but I listened to both and found them equally worthy—but different. I tend to prefer closed-back headphones for serious critical listening, such as evaluating recordings or audio equipment—and especially for setting a phono cartridge's azimuth, vertical tracking angle, and stylus rake angle. But for late-night motets, masses, and British folk music, I usually go with open-back 'phones—they feel more relaxed and expansive.

Only moments after I'd received my review samples of open-back Audeze EL-8s, they committed their first act of transcendent love: I played Paul McCreech and the Gabrieli Consort and Players' recording of Cristóbal de Morales's *Mass for the Feast of St. Isidore of Seville* (CD, Deutsche Grammophon 93904). Once again, the roof of my head became the dome of a cathedral. This 16th-century composition perfectly expresses the earthy sacredness of Spanish Christian feeling. The sound of the male choir was so well formed and accessible that I prepared to abandon my pagan rascality and join up with those hooded monks in their stone churches. The EL-8s' special beauty was their holistic way with space and inner detail—they made music seem beautifully proportional and correctly formed.

² See Tyll Herstens, "The Audeze LCD-X, Fazor, and a Fresh Listen to the Current LCD-2 and LCD-3": www.innerfidelity.com/content/audeze-lcd-x-fazor-and-fresh-listen-current-lcd-2-and-lcd-3.

GoldenEar has Engineered Our New Triton One to Perform Like a \$20,000+ Super Speaker!

"... the mere fact that it is not unreasonable to compare the sound of the \$4999 (pair) Triton One with the sounds of speakers costing tens of thousands of dollars more per pair says a lot about their level of performance ..." – Robert Deutsch, *Stereophile*



Two 5.25" High-Definition Cast-Basket Bass/Midrange Drivers w/ Multi-Vaned Phase Plugs

Optimized Dual-Chamber Upper-Bass/Midrange Enclosure with Angled Rear Walls

High-Velocity Folded Ribbon Tweeter (HVFRT) w/ Zobel Network

Open-Cell Polyurethane Foam Damping Pads and Complex Internal Bracing

Three 5" x 9" Quadratic Sub-Bass Drivers in Semi-Line-Source Array

Hybrid Phase-Perfect Electronic/Passive Low Frequency Crossover

Linear-Phase Fully Balanced Crossover Network

Four Inertially-Balanced Quadratic Planar Infrasonic Radiators: Two On Each Side of Cabinet

1600-Watt 56-Bit DSP-Controlled Class D Digital Amplifier

Accelerometer-Optimized Non-Resonant Cabinet w/ Non-Parallel Walls

Triton One Tower
\$2499 ea.

"A Giant-Killer Speaker ... Borderline Class A"

– *Stereophile Magazine*

Stereophile's Recommended Components Class A rating is their highest and most coveted honor. This year, for Class A Full-Range speakers, there were 12 honorees, ranging in price from \$16,000 to \$200,000 a pair, with an average cost of \$54,000. The fact that of all the 22 Class B Full-Range speakers, only one, the \$4999 a pair Triton One, was singled out and praised as, *"Borderline Class A"*, is a very unique and significant honor, totally confirming its unique stature and achievement.

"An absolute marvel ... Triton One shames some speakers costing ten times as much."

– Caleb Denison, *Digital Trends*

The Triton One is an evolutionary speaker that builds upon all the advanced technologies that have made the Tritons mega-hits around the world. This new top-of-the-line flagship was engineered to deliver even better dynamics and bass than the extraordinary Triton Two, along with further refinement of all aspects of sonic performance. How well have we succeeded? In the words of HD Living's Dennis Burger, the Triton One delivers, *"... the sort of upper-echelon performance that normally only comes from speakers whose price tags rival a good luxury automobile"*.

Triton One "creates visceral, tangible waves of pure audio bliss"

– Dennis Burger, *HD Living*

Great sound is what it is all about and the Triton Ones are, as HiFi+’s Chris Martens raved, *"jaw droppingly good ... one of the greatest high-end audio bargains of all time with a dazzling array of sonic characteristics that are likely to please (if not stun) the finicky and jaded of audiophiles"*. The Ones were specifically engineered to excel with all types of music as well as movies. Best of all, they offer previously unheard of value, as Brent Butterworth wrote in Sound & Vision, *"I heard a few people saying the Triton One sounded like some \$20,000-and-up high-end towers, but I disagree: I think they sounded better than most of them"*. Darryl Wilkinson summed them up best, *"A Masterpiece ... GoldenEar has fully ushered in the Golden Age of the Loudspeaker"*. Hear them for yourself and discover what all the excitement is about.

GoldenEar Technology
We Make High-End Affordable!™

www.goldenear.com

PO Box 141, Stevenson, MD 21153 (410) 998-9134



Like us on Facebook!
facebook.com/goldenear



Follow us on Twitter!
twitter.com/goldeneartech



AUDIOQUEST NIGHTHAWK SEMI-OPEN-BACK HEADPHONES

The last car I owned was a nickel-green, 1977 Mercedes-Benz 300D.³ It was a W123 saloon that came stock with four 4" (100mm) paper-cone speakers connected to its Becker radio—to which I attached a 3.5mm male input so that my partner, bb, could plug in her iPod during long trips. The first time bb did so, she said, "You have to hear my father's favorite jazz recording!" It was Dave Brubeck's "Take Five." In like three seconds she was stammering, "Oh my god! It never sounded like this before! Not even on my dad's stereo!"

Whereupon I launched into a tutorial on the virtues of full-range paper cones and pure copper wire wound around paper voice-coils. "Everything in audio sounds like the resonant nature of what it is made of; paper and copper sound more organic and natural."

She smiled sarcastically. "I'm sure it does."

I told this story to Skylar Gray, designer of AudioQuest's NightHawk headphones, after he'd described to me his thinking behind the paper-like bio-cellulose⁴ material used to make the NightHawks' 50mm dynamic-driver cones, and the "liquid wood"—an amalgam of wood and plant fibers—used to make the driver earcups. It's best to imagine the NightHawks as sensitive little full-range speakers mounted in a damped semi-box of wood ingeniously rigged to the ends of a semicircular stainless-steel rod of precisely the right diameter to properly tension each semi-box to the listener's head. An elegant substrap precisely and comfortably positioned the "protein leather"-cushioned earcups around my ears.

AudioQuest calls the NightHawks "semi-open": The exterior of each earcup is not entirely closed, but has a special, 3D-printed "biomimetic" diffuser grille that "mimics the latticework of a butterfly wing," says AQ. I suspect the diffuser grille functions to load (or stabilize) the dynamic driver in a very selective, controlled, perhaps "aperiodic" way.

Not surprisingly, cablemaker AudioQuest's first foray into headphone design includes a unique cord—actually, cords: the primary 8' home-listening cord is thick and rather stiff for a pair of headphones, and uses AudioQuest's best solid-copper conductors: Perfect-Surface Copper+. A second, skinnier,



The exterior of each NightHawk earcup is not entirely closed.

more flexible 8' cord is also included. Its sound had nowhere near the strength, detail, or grace of the thicker cord; the thinner cord is designed to be more durable and user-friendly on the road, in the subway, or in your backpack.

LISTENING: My first audition of the NightHawks was also at CES 2015, in AudioQuest's room. I don't remember the amp, but I remember the track: Paul Simon's "Graceland," which I've heard a jillion times. This time, I stood there shaking my head. Talk about speed and boogie factor: My aching bones could hardly keep up. I was also taken by its soulful, relaxed sound. I couldn't find any orchestral or choral music, so I couldn't tell much about resolution or soundstaging. And then...

When I received my review samples of the NightHawks, I was deep into my AKG K812 headphones, which I thought were the best I'd ever heard—along with the Abyss AB-1266 and the HiFiMan HE1000 models. By comparison, the AudioQuests sounded dull, dark, foggy, and compressed. I kept switching records, but everything sounded blah. I wrote AQ and asked if they'd changed the design since CES. Nope. I called Steve Guttenberg, and his tone got very serious. "Herb, the NightHawks are weird. They need at least 150–200 hours of break-in." He advised me to let them hang on the shelf and play 24/7 for a couple weeks, then listen again.

That was two months ago: I have



now put no fewer than 500 hours on the NightHawks. They're very much like those low-compliance phono cartridges that just keep getting better with age—up to a point. Every day, the NightHawks become more lively, open, and clear. Today I'm listening to Paul McCreech directing the Gabrieli Consort & Players in *Venetian Vespers*: sacred music by Monteverdi, Rigatti, Grandi, and Cavalli (2 CDs, Archiv Produktion 437 552-2). The NightHawks are sorting out the voices and atmospheric cues with more clarity

³ The last time HR visited, my daughter fell in love with that Mercedes, which she dubbed "the avacardo"—AD

⁴ In 1989, Sony released a "statement" headphone model, the MDR-R10, which had what Sony called Bio-Cellulose Dome Diaphragms. Only 2000 were produced, at \$2500/pair. Many regard the MDR-R10s as the best headphones ever made. Steve Guttenberg listened to them through a Red Wine Audio headphone amp and reviewed them for CNET. He described their sound as "effortless, unforced, yet still highly detailed and clear... more lifelike and natural than any other headphone I know... the wide-open sound-staging was exceptional." See www.cnet.com/news/sony-mdr-r10-the-worlds-best-headphone/.

GoldenEar's Amazing New SuperSub™ XXL is *"A Subwoofer to Die For"!*

— Sound&Vision Magazine

"What struck me most was not the sub's powerful and deep low frequency output, which I expected, but rather it's unusually high degree of tautness, transient speed and control" — Chris Martens, *The Absolute Sound*



"Sonic bliss ... remarkably powerful ... they kick ass, totally ... down to the infrasonic" — Mark Henninger, *AVS*

GoldenEar's new award-winning SuperSub XXL is an elegantly styled, finely finished and surprisingly compact subwoofer. It can effortlessly generate mega-sub-bass pressure waves of extremely high amplitude, while delivering extraordinarily detailed, accurate and precise low-frequency performance that is both highly impactful and extremely musical. Simply put, it is equally adept at recreating dramatic cinematic sound effects, as well as the subtle musical excellence of Ron Carter, Sting or Yo Yo Ma. To achieve this, we have engineered a unique, patent pending 360 degree dual-plane inertially-balanced active driver and sub-bass radiator topology, and combined it with a very advanced 56 bit DSP controlled 1600 watt Class D digital electronics package originally developed for our award winning Triton One.

"Blew me away ... the perfect balance of power and control, impact and unobtrusiveness, fury and finesse"

— Dennis Burger, *HD Living*

Housed within the gorgeous piano gloss black enclosure are two horizontally-opposed 12" ultra-long-throw active drivers and two vertically-opposed 12-3/4" x 14-1/2" planar infrasonic radiators. This dual-plane, patent-pending dynamic inertial-balancing preserves and focuses all the energy produced by the transducers, in order to more effectively move the air in the room, rather than wasting energy moving the box. It also enables you to hear all the fine subtle details in your recordings. The benefit is a new achievement in state-of-the-art subwoofer performance that, not only "rocks the house", as Big Picture Big Sound's Chris Boylan raved, but is also, "strong, pure and controlled" as Sound&Vision's Mark Fleischman wrote.

"The SuperSub XXL has looks to kill and is built to rock the house when duty calls"

— Sound&Vision

Best of all is GoldenEar's signature combination of high-end performance, superb build quality, gorgeous styling and extraordinary value. Mark Henninger raved, "The SuperSub XXL ups the ante down low". Secrets of Home Theater's Robert Kozel clearly stated, "... this is a bargain for a sub of this performance". Visit your nearest GoldenEar dealer and experience this super sub today.



SuperSub XXL
\$1999 ea.



GoldenEar Technology
We Make High-End Affordable!™

www.goldenear.com

PO Box 141, Stevenson, MD 21153 (410) 998-9134

 Like us on Facebook!
facebook.com/goldenear

 Follow us on Twitter!
twitter.com/goldeneartech

and grace than my current floorstanding speakers. Before full break-in, the NightHawks sounded dark and thick. Now they're transparent in a way I haven't quite experienced before. It feels pure and natural, not faux: not the result of some frequency-response anomaly.

Most headphones play the extravagant contrivances of pop, rock, and hip-hop pretty well. Most headphones kick jazz around in a very appealing way. But the NightHawks take my listening to classical, opera, and choral music to levels I can describe only as psychedelic. It is heavenly.

BALANCED VS UNBALANCED: My first experience of balanced headphones was with a PonoPlayer and a pair of borrowed Sennheiser HD600s with a custom cord. Instantly, I knew: *I like balanced.* Unlike single-ended headphones, with which images tend to stay in or near my skull, images in balanced mode seemed to expand out and away from my head. Images and the edges of soundstages were more tangible. Used with either of their standard cables, the AudioQuest NightHawks can work in balanced mode with the addition of a specially terminated AQ cable (prices start at \$109.95 for an 8' length). I listened to the AudioQuest NightHawks in both balanced and single-ended modes, and the differences were not subtle.

I spent a muggy August morning hunkered down, wearing a blindfold (I like listening to earspeakers in the dark), using the NightHawks and an Oppo HA-1 headphone amp to listen to *A Venetian Coronation 1595*, again with the Gabrielis conducted by the venerable McCreesh (CD, Virgin Classics VC 79110-2, 260 289-231). It's a scholarly, period-instrument reconstruction of the coronation of Marino Grimani, Doge of Venice, which took place in the gold-domed Basilica of St. Mark's. (McCreesh's version was recorded in the medieval Brinkburn Priory, in Northumberland, England.) It opens with a single microphone moving slowly toward a solitary church bell. You enter the monastery quietly, and the first and smallest of four organs begins to play. About four minutes in, the monks begin to chant the "Introit—Benedicta Sit Sancta Trinitas," which is followed by a *massive*, slowly approaching rendition, on drums and horns, of Cesare Bendinelli's Sonata 333.

With the NightHawks in balanced mode, I could *count* the drums and

horns. I could hear the players' feet on the stone floor. In single-ended mode, I couldn't.

In single-ended mode, the NightHawks reproduced the sounds of this culturally complex historical reconstruction with solid, densely packed authority, but a full appreciation of the multifarious nature of this visually

I can't say one bad word about either of these extraordinary new headphones.

evocative album, which won an award from *Gramophone*, demands maximum spatiality and fully realized images. In balanced mode, the NightHawks put my mind right into the scene. The sonic improvements were so subtle that I can't imagine how balanced listening will *not* become the future of high-end headphoning.

Headphone amps

Nowadays, every high-end integrated amplifier comes with a headphone jack, and behind every headphone jack is an electronic doodad—voltage divider, chipset, buffer, whatever—that most likely wasn't designed as a headphone amp. You think those things were designed by some can-jamming mad scientist, sweating away in his lab with a 'scope and a bunch of headphones, trying to make a great headphone amp? Not likely. More likely, there was a PR-marketing fellow asking some nameless amp designer if he could design a headphone amp. The nameless designer replies, via e-mail, "Sure, no problem," then proceeds to dig into a cardboard box for that old pair of Grado headphones from his college days. Which is why most headphone amps sound just okay.

For the purposes of this investigation, I used a variety of headphone-friendly integrated amplifiers, D/A headphone amplifiers, and just-plain headphone amplifiers, all recommendable, and all of which I'll discuss at length in some future column. Besides the very excellent Vinnie Rossi LIO integrated amp (\$7750 as reviewed in *Stereophile's* September, 2015 issue), I used the smooth- and rich-sounding Burson Conductor Virtuoso (\$1995); the extraordinarily detailed and transparent Simaudio Moon Neo 230HAD (\$1500); the just-right-sounding,

balanced-output Oppo H1-A (\$1199); the incredibly well-made, user-friendly, and emotionally engaging Audeze Deckard (\$699); and the too-good-to-be-true-for-the-price Asgard, from Schiit Audio (\$249). Which was the best? I do not yet know. I enjoyed them all.

Conclusions

Listen, folks, I'm new to this, and not as attuned to this world of headphones as I hope someday to become. But from where I now sit, it looks as if most of the best new, high-end audio inventions are being created to generate crystalized images inside those sacred naves between our ears.

I can't say one bad word about either of these extraordinary new headphones. Each plays music more enjoyably and more comfortably than I could have dreamed was possible only a few years ago. Each sounds quite different from the other. The Audeze EL-8s displayed a crisp, clear, March–April kind of light; the AudioQuest NightHawks delivered a clear but slightly darker October–November glow. The NightHawks' strong point was their testicular bass and tasty, organic richness. The EL-8s were less visceral, but more transparent and sparkly in the top five octaves. Both are less punchy, bold, or colorful than my old standby music-playing favorites, the non-Fazored Audeze LCD-2s. Both offer super audiophile sound quality that should cost at least twice as much. Both changed my perception of just how deep and exciting the experience of listening to music through headphones can be. I recommend both—every audiophile, old or young, should consider them must-auditions. ■

Herb Reichert (Stletters@sorc.com) fills his *Bed-Stuy* man cave with exotic audio equipment, both ancient and modern.

CONTACTS

Audeze LLC

1559 Sunland Lane
Costa Mesa, CA 92626
Tel: (714) 581-8010
Fax: (702) 823-0333
Web: www.audeze.com

AudioQuest

2621 White Road
Irvine, CA 92614
Tel: (949) 585-0111
Web: www.audioquest.com

MAX.

The diminutive yet at the same time unsurpassable name of our majestic, über-reference power amp MAX refers not just to the physical size of this gigantic mono block.

Rather, it merrily evokes the ultimate high-performance capabilities with which nature and our scientists – not exactly in that order – have endowed it.

MAX never fails to play with an ease that's as fascinating as it's formidable. Add to that stunningly elemental, tonal accuracy and striking macro- and micro-dynamic precision.

Imposing performance comes with compelling authority, awesome musicality and technical specifications almost no one else on the planet gets close to.

Distortion is kept to such a low level, it's virtually undetectable even with the most sophisticated laboratory equipment.

In a nutshell: No other amplifier has better loudspeaker control and fewer unwanted emissions.

Too bad not all German scientists seem to adhere to our meticulous standards these days.



Our mighty MAX does not emit harmful substances and has no secret test detection software. It did win "best sound" awards at this year's AXPONA, T.H.E. Show and High End Munich, though. Meet MAX at www.audionet.en.de/max. A note to our U.S. readers: call up Bill Parish at gttaudio.com. Thanks very much for your reference-class support.



Every Generation Has Its **Kii** Moment. Meet the **THREE**.

www.gttaudio.com 908.850.3092



Americas Flagship Boutique for
Audionet, Kii Audio, Kronos Audio
and YG Acoustics dealer.

Pure Seduction...
Sonja 1.3



All products on display. By appointment only.
Check our website for a full listing of brands represented.
Dealer inquires welcome.

Why Clean My Records?



Smart Reasons to Vacuum-Clean Your Vinyl!

Vacuum cleaning your records with the Record Doctor is the best way to get dirt, dust, and grime out of the grooves and hear the music you've been missing.

Better Sound – Cleaner records sound better than dirty records. Vacuum-cleaning your LP greatly reduces annoying clicks, pops, surface noise and distortion. According to US Government expert Gerald L. Gibson, "Dust can become embedded permanently into the disc's grooves, causing distortion of the transmitting signal, ticks, pops, and inferior sound quality."*

Higher Value – It makes sense that clean, well-cared-for records are worth more than dirty, poor-sounding discs. Protect your valuable vinyl investment with the Record Doctor.



Why Buy the Record Doctor V?

Stereophile magazine called Record Doctor "the least expensive way to effectively clean records." *Stereophile's* Analog Expert, Michael Fremer, reported "I highly recommend the Record Doctor V to any serious vinyl fan."

Try the Record Doctor V Risk Free!

Order a Record Doctor now and clean LPs for 30 days. If you're not completely satisfied, return it for a full refund. We think you'll love the good medicine that the Record Doctor brings to your music.

Record Doctor V with 4 oz. fluid applicator bottle, applicator brush, and illustrated cleaning instructions. [RDV] **Was \$299, for a limited time only \$199.00 – plus Free Shipping in the US**

To Order Call (800) 942-0220 or visit audioadvisor.com

Engineered in USA • www.wsdistributing.com • Distributors invited • ©2015 WS Distributing, LLC

*Gerald L. Gibson, Head of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress, 1991

PRODUCTS OF THE YEAR

by
ART
DUDLEY

The best audio products of 2015

TIMING DISTORTIONS ARE THE LIFEblood of magazine publishing—a field of endeavor where cheers cheered in September can sound wistful by raw November, when readers read them. Then again, by the time you see this, an asteroid strike or an itchy finger on a nuclear trigger may have blown us all back to the age of bronze—oxygen-free, one hopes—in which case this edition of *Stereophile's* Products of the Year celebration will seem all the more nostalgic.

But this is no mere nostalgia: Only once every 12 months do we set aside our complaints, our contentions, our niggling criticisms, and simply declare: Here are seven products that kicked righteous wads of ass and made it worthwhile to be an audiophile this year. And precisely half of our top-place winners are priced within reach of the average consumer.

How do we do it? The process begins in early September, when we supply *Stereophile's* official astrologer with the dates, times, and places of birth of the designers whose products were featured in our pages during the previous 12 months. We draw from that data a chart, which we then overlay with a graph showing how much money each of those companies spent on us for food and drink and advertising, and we circle the seven most conspicuous points of intersection. And *voilà*—there are our winners, staring us in the face.

I'm joking, of course: Our real methods aren't nearly so scientific. All we really do is listen to the stuff, write about it, and sometimes measure it. Then, come September, when the air is crisp and the leaves turn red and the shelves of our local Walmart fill with Christmas decorations, editor John Atkinson asks for nominations from all of us whose reviews were published in the last 12 monthly issues: from November of the previous year through October of the current year.

The candidates are limited to products that were the subjects of full Equipment Reports or Follow-Ups in the pages of those dozen issues of *Stereophile*, or were written about in a column by me or one of my colleagues: Michael Fremer, Michael Lavorgna, John

Marks, Herb Reichert, Kal Robinson, and Sam Tellig. We do not consider products that took top honors in any previous year's PotY celebration, or whose designers were born when Mercury was retrograde.

JA asks us to nominate up to six eligible products in each of seven categories: Analog Source Components (turntables, tonearms, phono cartridges, phono preamplifiers, phono transformers, and sundry step-up devices); Digital Source Components (D/A processors, transports, external clocks, media servers, and CD players); Amplification Components (preamplifiers, power amplifiers, and integrated amplifiers); Loudspeakers (including subwoofers); and Accessories (headphones, headphone amplifiers, cables, isolation devices, and media-cleaning products. Two overarching categories remain: Overall Component of the Year, and Budget Component of the Year. In 2015, the price ceiling for the latter is \$1500; if *Stereophile* still exists in 2054, that ceiling will be \$28,000.

In the next step, JA compiles and distributes a list of every component that was nominated by a minimum of three *Stereophile* contributors, the idea being to ensure that every one of those finalists was heard by as many of our reviewers as possible. Then the *Stereophile* contributor's job is to cast three votes in each of the seven categories: to give three points to his first choice, two points to his second choice, and one point to his third. In that manner, the results reveal a certain density of information: Surely, there are distinctions between the product that receives three first-place votes and the one that receives nine third-place votes.

Beginning last year, we writers, we band of brothers, have been asked to select our own Personal Product of the Year, in which each *Stereophile* contributor honors the one item that impressed him beyond all others. I think you should read mine first (an actual quote from a fellow audio writer!).

The final step: JA asks me to compose this essay, and allows me to tart it up with jokes about other writers. Indeed, it is JA who tallies the votes, so it is JA to whom the noncomplacent should send notes of praise or vituperation. (See his comments on the voting process at www.stereophile.com/asweseeit/1207awsi/index/html.)

On reflection, I see that I've made very few major purchases, houses and surgical procedures excepted, without checking to see what my favorite magazine writers had to say about each. Consequently or not, my career as a consumer has been largely successful, and my few failures—which include my sadly unreliable 2010 Volkswagen Tiguan and a Sealy Posturepedic mattress that I think might be a counterfeit—probably couldn't have been predicted without an astrolabe and a lifetime subscription to *Cosmopolitan*. My colleagues and I hope that *Stereophile's* Products of the Year selections for 2015, however personal they may be, will prove similarly useful.

The prices listed below were current as of August 2015. To order back issues mentioned in this article, call (888) 237-0955, or visit shop.stereophile.com (MasterCard and Visa only). "WWW" indicates that the review is available free of charge in our online Archives.

And the winners are . . .

ACOUSTIC SOUNDS SUPERHIREZ™

DSD Downloads & More — Your One-Stop Download Shop

MYTEK STEREO



192-DSS-DAC

Available in Silver and Black

E MYTEKSBP

CHORDETTE



2 QUTE DAC

Available in Silver and Black

E 2QUTES

AURALIC

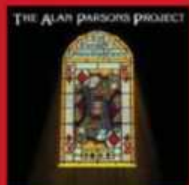


VEGA

DSD Compatible Audio Processor

E VEGA

DON'T MISS OUT ON THE BEST SOUNDING DOWNLOADS!



THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT
I Robot



THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT
The Turn Of A Friendly Card



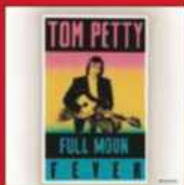
AHMAD JAMAL
Ahmad Jamal's
Alhambra



VARIOUS ARTISTS
17th Annual Blues Masters
at the Crossroads



THE ROLLING STONES
Let It Bleed



TOM PETTY
Full Moon Fever



TOM PETTY & THE
HEARTBREAKERS
Damn The Torpedoes



TOM PETTY & THE
HEARTBREAKERS
Into The Great Wide Open



TOM PETTY & THE
HEARTBREAKERS
Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers



TOM PETTY & THE
HEARTBREAKERS
Mojo



THE CARPENTERS
Singles 1969-1981



MICHAEL JACKSON
Thriller



MUDDY WATERS
Folk Singer



ERIC CLAPTON
Slowhand



LYNYRD SKYNYRD
Pronounced Leh-nerd
Skin-nerd



THE WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION OF AUDIOPHILE RECORDINGS

ACOUSTICSOUNDS.COM | SUPERHIREZ.COM | 800.716.3553



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2015

LOUDSPEAKERS

GOLDENEAR TRITON ONE

(\$4999.98/PAIR; REVIEWED BY ROBERT DEUTSCH, FEBRUARY 2015, VOL.38 NO.2 WWW)

KEF BLADE TWO

(\$25,000/PAIR; REVIEWED BY JOHN ATKINSON, JUNE 2015, VOL.38 NO.6 WWW)

History repeats: As happened in 2014 and 2013, the 2015 Loudspeaker of the Year contest resulted in a tie between two floorstanders. Yet this year marks the first time we've seen so wide a gap—a *fivefold* disparity—between the winners' prices.

The distinctly styled KEF Blade Two, which we featured on the cover of our June issue, is the rare sequel that dazzles rather than disappoints. (Think: *The Godfather: Part II*, not *Francis [The Talking Mule] Goes to the Races*.) The Blade Two retains the Uni-Q driver technology of the flagship KEF Blade, supplemented with a pair of smaller woofers—6.5" in diameter rather than

Left: GoldenEar Triton One
Right: KEF Blade Two (far right) with the original Blade.

9"—and weds them to a slightly shorter version of the Blade's high-tech molded enclosure. The result, according to JA: low distortion, wonderful balance (given not too large a room), and "imaging magic."

For one-fifth the Blade Two's price, the more conventional-looking GoldenEar Triton One is, in its way, no less dazzling. This besocked tower uses GoldenEar's High-Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR) tweeter, plus two 5.25" midrange cones, three internally powered 5" by 9" woofers, and four 7" by 10" passive planar radiators, to cover a range that, according to GoldenEar, stretches from 14Hz to 35kHz. Robert Deutsch confirmed that, in his room and system, a pair of Triton Ones extended down to at least 20Hz in a manner that stressed "quality rather than quantity of bass." RD's verdict: not quite Class A sound for Class B money, but accomplished enough to warrant comparison to much more expensive speakers.

NOTES ON THE VOTES: The two top winners each received the same numbers of votes (so much for data density), and twice as many as the next-closest finalist—almost as large a margin of victory as we can see in the Digital category. Also, 2015 is the third

year in a row in which a DeVore Fidelity Orangutan-series speaker has been a finalist without *quite* snagging the most votes. (The O/93 placed in 2014, while the O/96 placed this year and in 2013.)

FINALISTS

(in alphabetical order)

» BRYSTON MIDDLE T2
(\$5400/PAIR; REVIEWED BY KALMAN RUBINSON, FEBRUARY 2015, VOL.38 NO.2 WWW)

» DEVORE FIDELITY ORANGUTAN O/96
(\$12,000/PAIR; REVIEWED BY ART DUDLEY, JANUARY 2015, VOL.38 NO.1 WWW)

» FALCON ACOUSTICS LS3/5A
(\$2195/PAIR; REVIEWED BY HERB REICHERT, AUGUST 2015, VOL.38 NO.8 WWW)

» HARBETH SUPER HL5PLUS
(\$6695/PAIR; REVIEWED BY ART DUDLEY, JUNE 2015, VOL.38 NO.6 WWW)

» MAGNEPAN .7
(\$1400/PAIR; REVIEWED BY HERB REICHERT, AUGUST 2015, VOL.38 NO.8 WWW)

» REVEL PERFORMA3 M106
(\$2000/PAIR; REVIEWED BY JOHN ATKINSON, JANUARY 2015, VOL.38 NO.1 WWW)

» WILSON AUDIO SPECIALTIES DUETTE SERIES 2
(\$22,500/PAIR; REVIEWED BY ART DUDLEY, MARCH 2015, VOL.38 NO.3 WWW)



BREAKING NEW SOUND BARRIERS

WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T IMPROVE ON PERFECTION? INTRODUCING THE NEW SERIES 7 AMPLIFIERS FROM SOULUTION.

SOULUTION 725 PREAMPLIFIER

Experience absolute control and precision across all frequencies, thanks to the 725's completely redesigned power supply. Soulution's flagship preamplifier delivers breathtaking transparency, sonic richness, and no-holds-barred punch at low frequencies.



SOULUTION 711 STEREO AMPLIFIER

Unleash the full power of your hi-fi recordings. Soulution's new stereo amplifier unites precision, power, speed, and stability in a single earth-shaking package. The 711's upgraded "switched mode" power supply is Swiss-engineered and audiophile-approved.



 soulution
nature of sound

The Axiss Audio Collection

Axiss Audio travels the globe in search of the finest examples of audio perfection.

Each of our brands offers a unique advantage to the discriminating audiophile.

Only the most superb components, such as the award-winning Series 7 from Soulution, are showcased in our collection.

Visit www.axissaudio.com or call 310-329-0187 to find the dealer nearest you.

AXISS

AUDIO



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2015

AMPLIFICATION

BEL CANTO DESIGN BLACK AMPLIFICATION SYSTEM

(\$50,000/SYSTEM; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER & JOHN ATKINSON, JULY & OCTOBER 2015, VOL.38 NOS. 7 & 10 WWW)

Described by Bel Canto Design as an amplification system, the Black is a three-box integrated amplifier in which one box (the ASC1) serves as a digital preamplifier and system clock, and the other two boxes (the MPS1Ps) are monoblock amplifiers with a digital input and a class-D output stage, each capable

of passing 1200W across a 2 ohm load. The ASC1, most of whose inputs are digital, also handles DSD, and can be controlled by means of an iPhone/iPad app, a remote-control handset, or its own built-in multifunction knob. Through the Black system, Michael Fremer heard some of the best "Red Book" CD sound of his experience, and enjoyed "velvety-rich, three-dimensional sound" from his high-resolution files. Irrespective of source, he declared the Bel Canto Black "the best-sounding implementation of class-D technology" he has heard to date.

NOTES ON THE VOTES: Unlike last year's Products of the Year celebra-

tion, in which the winners were more or less evenly divided between solid-state and tubed designs, 2015 appears to have been a banner year for Our Friend the Transistor: Only the Line Magnetic LM-518IA integrated amp and the VAC Signature SE preamplifier use tubes. But don't read anything into that.

FINALISTS

(in alphabetical order)

» AYRE ACOUSTICS AX-5 TWENTY INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

(\$12,950; REVIEWED BY ART DUDLEY, AUGUST 2015, VOL.38 NO.8 WWW)

» AYRE ACOUSTICS KX-R TWENTY PREAMPLIFIER

(\$27,500; REVIEWED BY JOHN ATKINSON, DECEMBER 2014, VOL.37 NO.12 WWW)

» AYRE ACOUSTICS MX-R TWENTY MONOBLOCK POWER AMPLIFIER

(\$29,500/PAIR; REVIEWED BY JOHN ATKINSON, AUGUST 2015, VOL.38 NO.8 WWW)

» BRICASTI DESIGN M28 MONOBLOCK POWER AMPLIFIER

(\$30,000/PAIR; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER & JOHN ATKINSON, MAY & AUGUST 2015, VOL.38 NOS. 5 & 8 WWW)

» LINE MAGNETIC LM-518IA INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

(\$4450; REVIEWED BY HERB REICHERT, OCTOBER 2015, VOL.38 NO.10 WWW)

» PS AUDIO SPROUT INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

(\$499; REVIEWED BY HERB REICHERT, MAY 2015, VOL.38 NO.5 WWW)

» SIMAUDIO MOON EVOLUTION 860A POWER AMPLIFIER

(\$15,000; REVIEWED BY FRED KAPLAN, AUGUST 2015, VOL.38 NO.8 WWW)

» VAC SIGNATURE SE PREAMPLIFIER (\$26,000 WITH PHONO STAGE, AS TESTED; REVIEWED BY ROBERT J. REINA, JUNE 2015, VOL.38 NO.6 WWW)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2015

ANALOG

SWEDISH ANALOG TECHNOLOGIES TONEARM

(\$28,000; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER, JULY 2015, VOL.38 NO.7 WWW)

This year's analog winner is nothing less than an all-out, engineering-driven assault on the state of the art of the 9" pivoting tonearm. Made from stainless steel, brass, and carbon-fiber laminates, the dynamically balanced Swedish Analog Technologies arm features a removable headshell with integral azimuth adjustment, and point-and-cup bearings with user-adjustable



Enjoyed Worldwide.



"The Sigma SSP can be regarded as a superb stereo analog preamp, and all the rest of its bells and whistles as a gift."

Kal Robinson, Stereophile, USA

"It combines the flexibility of a Swiss Army knife with the precision of a surgeon's tool in an easy-to-use package. There's simply not enough room here to even pretend to detail what you can do with this processor. It's just awesome."

Theo Nicolakis, Audioholics.com, USA

"But most impressive is the sound quality. This is real high-end at a price that must be considered reasonable. And the step up from the traditional home cinema receivers is nothing but huge."

Ludwig Swanberg, HemmaBio, Sweden

"Oh my, what a wonderful system Classe has provided with the Sigma range. It shows that audiophile sound is not the sole preserve of stereo and equally that it is not incompatible with reliable and convenient operation."

Stephen Dawson, Audio Esoterica, Australia

"This Sigma system is a huge achievement which everyone must absolutely discover."

Adrien Rouah, Québec Audio & Video, Canada

loading. The arm comes with two differently sized counterweights, to suit a variety of cartridges, and is shipped in a foam-lined Pelican case.

In noting the retail price of last year's Analog Source Component of the Year, the VPI Classic Direct Turntable with JMW Memorial 3D-Printed 12" tonearm (\$30,000), we wrote that it "may be a stretch for most enthusiasts." A tonearm that, on its own, sells for nearly the same amount will find its way into even fewer—far fewer—homes, yet is significant for all phonophiles in showing how much further the vinyl envelope can be pushed. And indeed, as Michael Fremer wrote in *Stereophile's* July issue, "the SAT fundamentally and dramatically changed and improved the sound of my system in ways I had not imagined a tonearm could." After using the SAT arm on his reference Continuum Audio



Labs Caliburn turntable—thus making possible a direct comparison with his reference Continuum Cobra tonearm (\$22,500)—MF said that the Swedish arm delivered sound quality that "far exceeded, in every parameter, that of any other arm I've heard."

NOTES ON THE VOTES: The SAT arm didn't get as many votes as the second-place finalist, the Brinkmann Spyder turntable, but of the votes it did receive, all but one were for first place

(ie, fewer votes, but more points). The takeaway: An unsurprisingly smaller number of *Stereophile* reviewers have actually heard the Swedish arm—but those who have were mightily impressed.

FINALISTS

(in alphabetical order)

» **BRINKMANN SPYDER TURNTABLE** (\$14,000 WITHOUT TONEARM; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER, MAY 2015, VOL.38 NO.5)

» **LAMM INDUSTRIES LP 2.1 PHONO PREAMPLIFIER** (\$8990; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER, MARCH 2015, VOL.38 NO.3)

» **LEEMA ACOUSTICS ESSENTIALS PHONO PREAMPLIFIER** (\$749; REVIEWED BY ART DUDLEY, OCTOBER 2015, VOL.38 NO.10 WWW)

» **MIYAJIMA LABS MADAKE PHONO CARTRIDGE** (\$5895; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER, DECEMBER 2014, VOL.37 NO.12)

» **SOUNDSMITH CARMEN PHONO CARTRIDGE** (\$799.95; REVIEWED BY HERB REICHERT, JUNE 2015, VOL.38 NO.6 WWW)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2015

DIGITAL

PONO PONOPLAYER

(\$399; REVIEWED BY JOHN ATKINSON & MICHAEL LAVORGNA, APRIL, JUNE & SEPTEMBER 2015, VOL.38 NOS. 4, 6 & 9 WWW)

For an audio reviewer to rail against the MP3 format is one thing; for Neil Young to do so is quite another. And as this well-loved musician proved in 1985, when his support was instrumental in launching the Farm Aid benefits, and again in 1986, when he and his then wife, Pegi Young, founded the Bridge School, a motivated Neil Young is a force to be reckoned with. Young's quest led him to Ayre Acoustics, the company that designed this year's digital winner, the PonoPlayer: a portable, high-resolution, Kickstarter-funded music-file player famously shaped like a Toblerone bar. The PonoPlayer handles PCM files up to 24-bit/192kHz as well as DSD files, and is equally at home with headphones—special cables allow the PonoPlayer to drive suitable headphones in balanced mode—or as a line-level source in a high-resolution home system. As JA observed in his review, the PonoPlayer is "a well-engineered, high-performance, portable player . . . at a fair, affordable price."

NOTES ON THE VOTES: Three of this year's top vote-getters are por-



The new 800 Series Diamond
didn't get better by chance.
It got better by change.
868 changes to be precise.

Bowers & Wilkins

bowers-wilkins.com



tables, the others being the Astell&Kern AK240 and Sony NW-ZX2. Even more interesting—but not, in my view, surprising—was the PonoPlayer's considerable margin of victory: This was the *least* close race in our 2015 Products of the Year voting.

FINALISTS

(in alphabetical order)

» **ANTIPODES DX MUSIC SERVER**
(\$6500–\$7500; REVIEWED BY JOHN ATKINSON, OCTOBER 2015, VOL.38 NO.10 WWW)

» **ASTELL&KERN AK240 PORTABLE PLAYER**

(\$2500; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL LAVORGNA & JOHN ATKINSON, NOVEMBER 2014 & FEBRUARY 2015, VOL.37 NO.11 & VOL.38 NO.2 WWW)

» **AURALIC ARIES NETWORK BRIDGE**
(\$1599; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL LAVORGNA, JANUARY 2015, VOL.38 NO.1 WWW)

» **BRICASTI DESIGN M1 DIGITAL PROCESSOR**

(\$8595; REVIEWED BY JOHN MARKS, DECEMBER 2014, VOL.37 NO.12 WWW)

» **DEQX PREMATE DAC-PREAMPLIFIER-EQUALIZER**

(\$5995; REVIEWED BY KALMAN RUBINSON, DECEMBER 2014, VOL.37 NO.12 WWW)

» **PS AUDIO PERFECTWAVE CD/DVD TRANSPORT**

(\$3999; REVIEWED BY ROBERT DEUTSCH, FEBRUARY 2015, VOL.38 NO.2 WWW)

» **SIMAAUDIO MOON MIND NETWORK PLAYER**

(\$990; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL LAVORGNA, JANUARY 2015, VOL.38 NO.1 WWW)

» **SONY NW-ZX2 HI-REZ WALKMAN**
(\$1199.99; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL LAVORGNA, MAY 2015, VOL.38 NO.5 WWW)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2015

ACCESSORY

AUDIOQUEST JITTERBUG

(\$49; REVIEWED BY JOHN ATKINSON, SEPTEMBER 2015, VOL.38 NO.9 WWW)

ROON MUSIC LIBRARY/FILE PLAYER APP

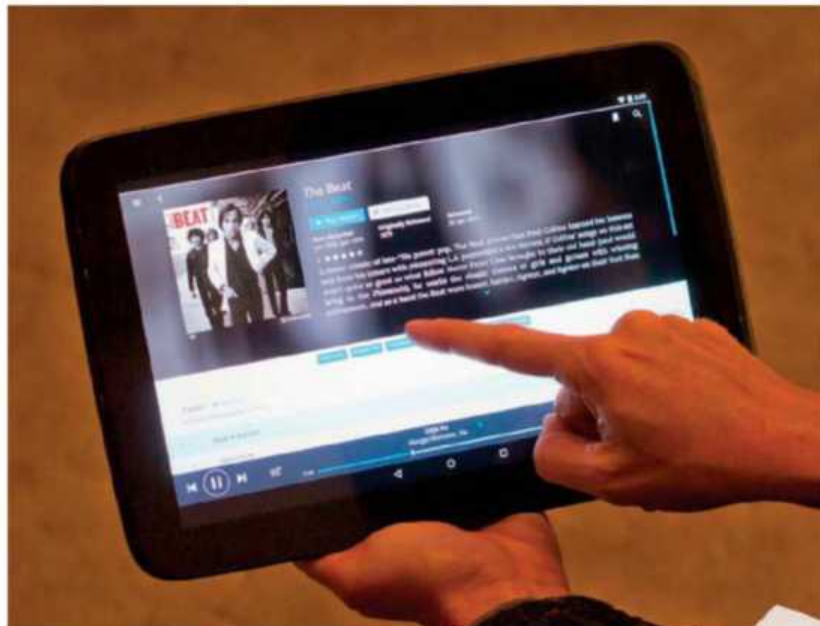
(\$199/YEAR, \$499/LIFETIME; REVIEWED BY JON IVERSON, OCTOBER 2015, VOL.38 NO.10 WWW)

A tie between something you can't see from across the room and something that can't be touched? This gets better and better.

High-end audio accessories comprise the most interesting category, if only because there are such profound differences in price and size and technology among the individual products therein: signal cables, power cords and conditioners, furniture, marking pens, signal generators, subminiature gamelan bells, cable risers . . . and headphones—a category that threatened to dominate last year's voting. But this year there's only one pair of 'phones among the finalists, and it didn't quite top the list. First place for 2015 is split between two products, both aimed squarely at computer-audio enthusiasts.

The AudioQuest JitterBug is a noise filter the size and shape of a memory stick: Buy it, plug it into an unused USB Type A socket, and enjoy the subtle but real, low-BS improvement in sound. I'm looking at mine right now: It works, and it's staying right where it is. What's not to like?

I haven't yet bought a subscription to the metadata-heavy playback application from Roon, a company spun off from Sooloos LLC, but I've tried it—and Roon v1.0 unquestionably appeals to my love for album graphics, liner notes, and occasional bouts of freestyle listening. Jon Iverson called it “a tour de force of



programming” and “a bargain.” I cannot disagree.

NOTES ON THE VOTES: Apart from the fact that the JitterBug received slightly more first- and second-place votes than Roon, suggesting that it sparked in our reviewers a slightly higher level of enthusiasm, the only remarkable thing about the 2015 list of Accessories of the Year finalists is that all of them are fairly conventional. Fans of the fantastical will have to try harder next year.

FINALISTS

(in alphabetical order)

» **AUDIOENGINE B1 BLUETOOTH RECEIVER**

(\$189; REVIEWED BY SAM TELLIG, DECEMBER 2014, VOL.37 NO.12)

» **HIFI MAN HE 400I HEADPHONES**
(\$499; REVIEWED BY SAM TELLIG, DECEMBER 2014, VOL.37 NO.12)

» **SIMAAUDIO MOON EVOLUTION 820S POWER SUPPLY**

▲ Roon music library/file player app



▲ AudioQuest JitterBug

(\$8000; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER, NOVEMBER 2014, VOL.37 NO.11 WWW)

» **STILLPOINTS APERTURE ROOM PANELS**

(\$650 EACH; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER, FEBRUARY 2015, VOL.38 NO.2)

» **SUPERWIREMOLD DEEP-CRYO AC POWER STRIP**

(\$399; REVIEWED BY ART DUDLEY, SEPTEMBER 2015, VOL.38 NO.9 WWW)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2015

BUDGET

MAGNEPAN .7 LOUDSPEAKER

(\$1400/PAIR; REVIEWED BY HERB REICHERT, AUGUST 2015, VOL.38 NO.8 WWW)

Our list of finalists for Budget Product of the Year contains a little of everything—an amp, a cartridge, a computer-audio accessory, a portable music player, two turntables, and some speakers. It was from the last group that *Stereophile's* reviewers selected the Magnepan .7—the first time a panel speaker has won in this category. Herb Reichert wrote that he could very happily live with the two-way, planar-magnetic .7, whose only concession to thrift had to do with size, not quality: “With every recording, I thought: *Who needs more than this?*”

NOTES ON THE VOTES: In at least one respect, our 2015 Products of the Year results are more encouraging than last year's: In 2014, no product placed in both the Budget and Overall Product of the Year categories—but as you'll see below, this year there was one: the PonoPlayer, which also won as Digital Product of the Year. This is almost as good as 2013, when the KEF LS50 loud-



speaker was voted Budget Product of the Year and Overall Product of the Year. (Unless I'm mistaken, we have yet to see a single product take top honors in three categories. In 2010, it seemed possible that the Peachtree iDecco might win or at least place in four categories—Digital, Amplification, Budget, and Overall—but

that didn't happen.)

FINALISTS

(in alphabetical order)

» AUDIOENGINE A2+ LOUDSPEAKER (\$249/PAIR; REVIEWED BY JOHN ATKINSON, APRIL 2015, VOL.38 NO.4 WWW)

» AUDIOQUEST JITTERBUG

» BOWERS & WILKINS 683 S2 LOUDSPEAKER

(\$1650/PAIR; REVIEWED BY KALMAN RUBINSON, SEPTEMBER 2015, VOL.38 NO.9 WWW)

» EMOTIVA AUDIO PRO AIRMOTIV 4S LOUDSPEAKER

(\$299/PAIR; REVIEWED BY ROBERT J. REINA, APRIL 2015, VOL.38 NO.4 WWW)

» MUSIC HALL IKURA TURNTABLE (\$1195 INCLUDING TONEARM AND PHONO CARTRIDGE; REVIEWED BY ROBERT J. REINA, DECEMBER 2014, VOL.37 NO.12 WWW)

» PIONEER PLX-1000 TURNTABLE (\$699 INCLUDING TONEARM; REVIEWED BY HERB REICHERT, MARCH & JULY 2015, VOL.38 NOS. 3 & 7 WWW)

» PONO PONOPLAYER

» PS AUDIO SPROUT INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

» REVEL PERFORMA3 M106 LOUDSPEAKER

» SOUNDSMITH CARMEN PHONO CARTRIDGE



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2015

OVERALL

KEF BLADE TWO LOUDSPEAKER

Son of a Blade! This year's Overall Product of the Year is the unabashedly high-tech KEF Blade Two. The rare loudspeaker that employs neither wood nor pulp in its manufacture, the Blade Two's radically shaped enclosure is formed from high-density polyurethane, while the diaphragms of all six of its drive-units are metal. During its time in JA's lab, the Blade Two distinguished itself with “measured performance that is close to the state of the art,” and, as KEF's deputy (no jokes!) flagship, this British speaker has impressed the Dickens out of consumers and reviewers alike, me included.

NOTES ON THE VOTES: This year saw a very divided vote for Overall Product of the Year. It seems that each finalist had a strong following, and the final tallies were as close as close could be. Notably, the product that got the second-highest number of votes—the PonoPlayer—was the only 2015 product to place in three categories.

FINALISTS

(in alphabetical order)

» AYRE ACOUSTICS KX-R TWENTY PREAMPLIFIER

» AYRE ACOUSTICS MX-R TWENTY POWER AMPLIFIER

» BEL CANTO DESIGN BLACK AMPLIFICATION SYSTEM

» GOLDENEAR TRITON ONE LOUDSPEAKER

» PONO PONOPLAYER

» ROON MUSIC LIBRARY/FILE PLAYER

» SWEDISH ANALOG TECHNOLOGIES TONEARM



Meet Apogee Groove

Headphone Amp/DAC for Mac & PC



Actual Size

We've Been Making Hit Records for 30 years

Since 1985 Apogee has been making the gear audio professionals prefer using to record, mix and master performances by the world's most successful artists. Now you can have the same sonic experience sitting in your man chair. Surprisingly small and incredibly powerful, Groove is capable of driving the most demanding headphones and adapting the output from your computer for any type of headphones to deliver the best possible sound quality. Whether you are listening to high res audio files or streaming music you'll be amazed by the difference - the precise stereo image, punchy bass and stunningly clear highs.



Pros and Audiophiles love Groove!

Checkout the reviews on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), and [Sweetwater.com](https://www.sweetwater.com)

www.apogeedigital.com/groove





PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2015

EDITORS' CHOICES

AUDIODESKSYSTEME GLÄSS VINYL CLEANER

(\$3995; REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FREMER, FRED KAPLAN, AND ART DUDLEY IN JUNE 2012, SEPTEMBER 2013, AND MARCH 2015)

Of the products I wrote about in 2015, one enhanced my enjoyment of recorded music every day: the Audiodesksysteme Gläss Vinyl Cleaner from Germany. This ultrasonic record washer is expensive but not overpriced, and is easily the best-thought-out audio accessory I've ever used. Best of all, the Vinyl Cleaner taught me that a lot of what I took to be record-groove damage is actually record-groove dirt—it can be removed, and the effects of doing so are musically and sonically stunning.—ART DUDLEY

AYRE ACOUSTICS KX-R TWENTY LINE PREAMPLIFIER

(\$27,500)

Reviewing this product marked a moment of satori in my audio life: Here was an active preamplifier, with all that that entails, that sounded better than having *no* preamplifier in the signal path. I miss it every day.—JOHN ATKINSON

BRICASTI DESIGN M28 MONOBLOCK POWER AMPLIFIER

(\$30,000/PAIR)

One of my once-in-a-blue-moon Saturday-afternoon audio get-togethers was enlivened when Bricasti's Brian

Zolner and Casey Dowdell arrived with the then-new M28 monoblocks. The assembled company was gobsmacked by the M28s' bass authority, floor-to-

ceiling soundstage, and transparency. A friend who was present subsequently bought a pair; he says they are the best audio purchase of his life.—JOHN MARKS



Audiodesksysteme
Gläss Vinyl Cleaner



Ayre Acoustics
KX-R Twenty line
preamplifier

Bricasti Design
M28 monoblock
power amplifier



Unfair

Yes, it's unfair that no other headphone in this price range has our technology or stunning sound quality. Special planar magnetic drivers give you that "you are there" listening experience with an extended frequency response that opens up a new world of sound.

Our unfair advantage goes even deeper with iconic industrial design by BMW's DesignworksUSA and quality aluminum construction for lifelong pride of ownership.

Unfairly priced as well.

www.audeze.com



DEQX PREMATE DAC-PREAMPLIFIER-EQUALIZER (\$5995)

This DAC-preamplifier-equalizer is nearly perfect: A superb DAC and control preamplifier, it's also capable of speaker and room correction, based on independent measurements and filters. Despite its challenging manual and cluttered user interface, the PreMate is easy to use as a control preamp that can make any system sound better. For me, perfection will arrive when they make one with six channels.—KALMAN RUBINSON

GOLDENEAR TRITON ONE LOUDSPEAKER (\$4999.98/PAIR)

Reasonably priced by high-end standards, the Triton One is a full-range speaker that combines high resolution and high transparency to a degree that invites comparison with far more expensive offerings. I came *this* close to buying the review pair.—ROBERT DEUTSCH

GOLDENEAR TRITON ONE LOUDSPEAKER (\$4999.98/PAIR)

I've never listened to the GoldenEar

Triton Ones under familiar conditions, but have heard them two or three times at various audio shows, often with familiar program material I brought with me. Their depth, imaging, and balance were hard to criticize, and at \$4999.98/pair, the Triton One can hold its own with many speaker designs selling for deep-pocket money. This should be no surprise; GoldenEar's founder, Sandy Gross, has a knack for founding successful speaker companies (Polk, Definitive Technology) that produce exceptional speakers at affordable prices.—THOMAS J. NORTON

PS AUDIO SPROUT INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER (\$499)

A poll of 20 or so engineers suggests that the Sprout might make the whole "better sound" thing worth considering. They immediately see themselves seamlessly moving devices in and out of the system, like what they hear, and jump to imagining a set of speakers. Wait till they hear it. Congratulations, PS Audio.—BRIAN DAMKROGER

Top to bottom: DEQX PreMate DAC-preamplifier-equalizer; GoldenEar Triton One loudspeaker; PS Audio Sprout integrated amplifier





B.B. King
Freddie King
Albert King
Bascom King?

The new standard in headphone amplification, designed for us by world-renowned designer Bascom King. Featuring a hybrid design with tube input and MOSFET single-ended class-A output, The King will drive any headphone from low-Z to high-Z, and even Jay-Z. Limited quantities available. Made in the USA with parts sourced throughout the Kingdom.

It's great to be King.

www.audeze.com



THETA DIGITAL PROMETHEUS MONOBLOCK POWER AMPLIFIER

(\$12,000/PAIR; REVIEWED BY LARRY GREENHILL IN MARCH 2015)

I was sad when I learned that the Theta Digital Prometheus didn't make it to the second round. It is by far the best audio product I've reviewed in a long time. Perhaps it has something to do with its odd exterior.—LARRY GREENHILL

Top to bottom: Roon music library/file player app; Simaudio Moon Evolution 740P line preamplifier; Theta Digital Prometheus monoblock power amplifier



ROON MUSIC LIBRARY/FILE PLAYER APP

(\$199/YEAR, \$499/LIFETIME)

Easy choice! the Roon app is so far ahead of other music-library management tools that I don't see why anyone wouldn't want to at least give it a try. Honorable mention: Cambridge Audio's Azur 851D DAC (\$1649) deserves a spot for the tremendous value it offers.—JON IVERSON

ROON MUSIC LIBRARY/FILE PLAYER APP

(\$199/YEAR, \$499/LIFETIME)

Roon is *the* killer app we've been waiting for—and it continues to improve. Roon will grow with your library, and the company will continue to improve and expand its metadata to keep pace with musicians' personal info and output, as well as any new associations with stuff in your existing music library.

—MICHAEL LAVORGNA

SIMAUDIO MOON EVOLUTION 740P LINE PREAMPLIFIER

(\$9500; REVIEWED BY FRED KAPLAN IN MAY 2015)

My audio revelation this year sprang from the Simaudio Moon Evolution 740P, which unveiled new layers of detail, transparency, and lifelike musical *thereness*. I've since heard preamps that are more transparent but also much more expensive. The 740P isn't cheap, but it brings celestial pleasures somewhat down to earth.—FRED KAPLAN



Product of the Year

'Silver 6' - SoundStage

"...you need to hear them. Pronto."

*'Silver 8' - **WHAT HI-FI?***



Since 1972, Monitor Audio have been at the leading edge of loudspeaker design and technology, perfecting the implementation of metal based drivers with their proprietary C-CAM drivers. Hear the C-CAM difference at a fine retailer near you.

monitoraudiousa.com

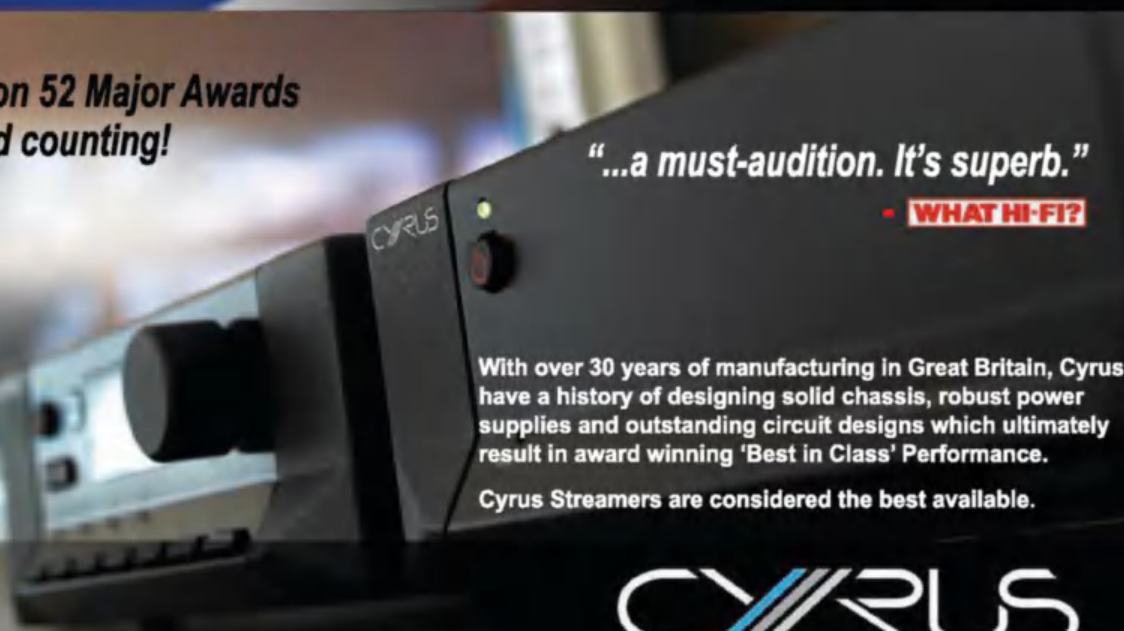
BEST OF BRITAIN

cyrusaudio.com

Cyrus have won 52 Major Awards since 2005 and counting!

"...a must-audition. It's superb."

*- **WHAT HI-FI?***



With over 30 years of manufacturing in Great Britain, Cyrus have a history of designing solid chassis, robust power supplies and outstanding circuit designs which ultimately result in award winning 'Best in Class' Performance.

Cyrus Streamers are considered the best available.

Pangea Audio Introduces the \$29.95 AC-14 Power Cable and Something Unexpected Happens...



Jay Victor, Designer

Jay designed the Pangea Audio AC-14 AC power cable specifically for source components like preamps, CD players, and DACs. Jay kept the price low – \$29.95/1M – by keeping the design elegantly simple and by using high-integrity molded connectors. Pangea Audio loved the AC-14 cable and introduced it to the market.

Four years ago, Pangea Audio decided to develop a low price power cable as an upgrade to the cheap power cables that came in the box with nearly all high-end audio gear. They asked veteran cable designer, Jay Victor, for help. Holder of more than forty patents and trademarks for audio gear, Jay Victor has designed high-end audio cables for over a dozen high-end audio brands.

Shortly after AC-14's introduction something unexpected happened. Audiophiles around the country began reporting the inexpensive AC-14 sounded better than other upgrade power cables costing five to ten times more. Word of AC-14's excellent performance quickly spread among audiophiles. Over the next few years, more than *twenty thousand* AC-14 cables were sold.

Pangea Audio's AC-14 was quickly followed by the massive seven-gauge AC-9 power cable for the high-current demands of power amplifiers, and then by other more advanced "SE" Pangea Audio cables. These newer cables featured better shielding and higher grades of Japanese-made copper for improved performance. The new cables sold extremely well. Then one day – without any warning – the Japanese company announced it was no longer making the high-end copper.

Pangea Audio began searching for a new high-grade replacement copper.

American Solution Courtesy of George Cardas



**George Cardas
Cardas Audio**

Years earlier, industry veteran, George Cardas, was unhappy with the quality of the copper available for his high-end cables. George decided to make his own copper conductors. His search eventually led him to a small conductor manufacturer in New England that was about to close. George's orders revived the factory, and it's still operating today.

Pangea Audio contacted George and asked if he would be willing to sell them his premium copper.

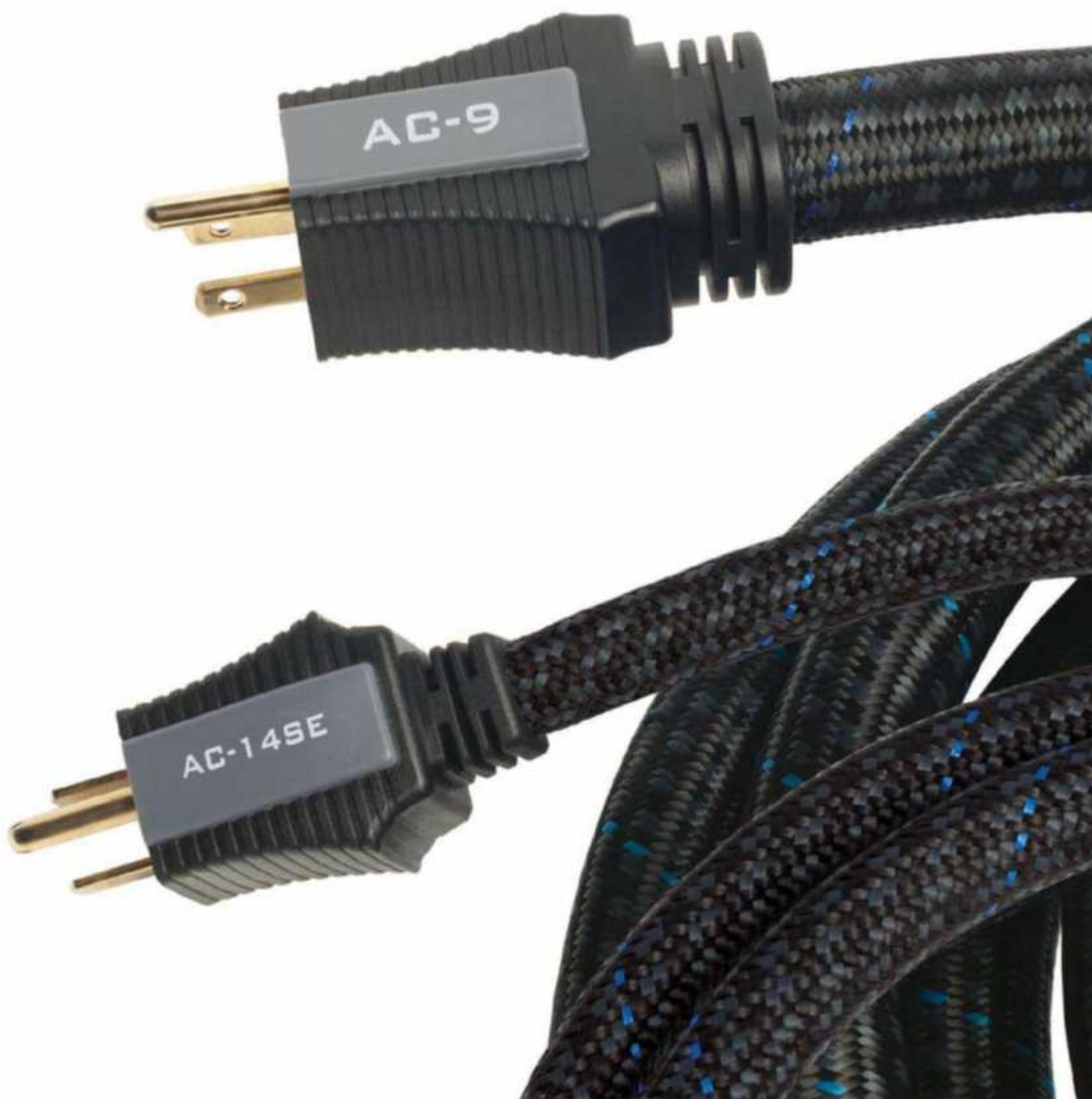
"Why not?" was George's reply and they struck a deal.

Mined in Arizona, the copper is shipped to New England, where it is melted down and then slowly drawn into conductors using a custom-build Argon gas-filled extrusion machine. Argon gas is used to ensure that no oxygen impurities get into George's copper. The Cardas Grade One Copper is then flown to the Far East, where each Pangea Audio cable is carefully hand made.

George's copper costs a bit more than the Japanese copper Pangea Audio had been using. One listen, however, and Pangea knew the difference was worth it!

George calls Cardas Grade One Copper "the most amazing audio conductor I have ever experienced. It is quite simply the best copper on the planet."

PANGEA®
A U D I O
AN AMERICAN COMPANY



Two Amazing New Power Cables with Cardas Grade One Copper

NEW Pangea Audio AC-14SE MkII fourteen-gauge power cable for source gear, 1.0M now with Cardas Grade One Copper and solid copper blade AC contacts, Regular \$200, now only \$49.99 with *Free Shipping

NEW Pangea Audio AC-9 MkII seven-gauge power cable for power-hungry gear, 1.0M with Cardas Grade One Copper and DeathGrip™ IEC connections, Regular \$250, now only \$99.99 with *Free Shipping

To Order Call Audio Advisor (800) 942-0220 or Visit audioadvisor.com or amazon.com

Audio Advisor, Inc. 3427 Kraft SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49512 ® Pangea is a registered trademark of WS Distributing, LLC.

© 2015 Audio Advisor, Inc. *Free Shipping in Continental US, PR & APO/FPO Boxes



COMMAND

PERFORMANCE

Holiday Open House
Saturday, December 12th
Noon to 5pm

meet **ROBERT SUCHY**
Managing Director of Clearaudio



Innovation Wood Turntable



Clearaudio Statement V2



Goldfinger Statement Cartridge



Double Matrix Professional
Sonic record cleaning machine



Ovation Turntable

**MUSICAL
SURROUNDINGS**

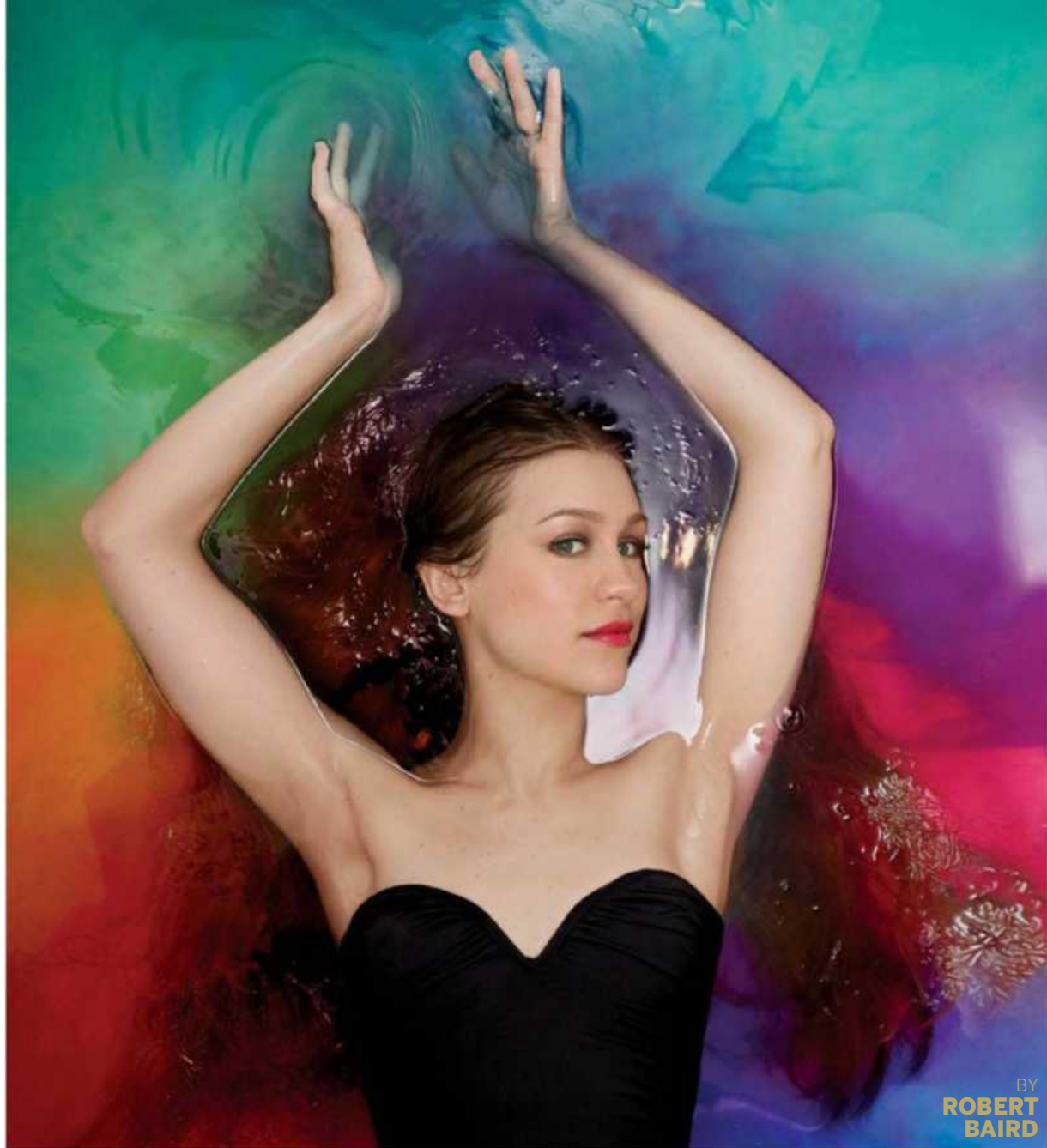
510.547. 5006 musicalsurrroundings.com



COMMAND PERFORMANCE

AV

COMMAND PERFORMANCE - 115 Park Ave #2 in Falls Church, Virginia
Please RSVP at 703 532-7239 or by E-mail to info@commandav.com



BY
ROBERT BAIRD

JOANNA

NEWSOM **KINGDOM OF THE HARP**

TALK DIRTY TO ME!

"I had to master this record *11 times* to get it to sound the way I wanted," Joanna Newsom growled with the knowing grit of someone who's worked through a sonic ordeal.

"Instead of test pressings, we had test lacquers for this one."

"I have no way to listen to music digitally in my house."

Oooh, baby!

At a time when the future of print is troubled, Newsom

can make even a magazine editor feel slightly more secure.

"I love your magazine. I love your publication."

The story of Joanna Newsom is nothing but surprises. A childhood prodigy on the concert harp, she's turned her gifts to making intricate, layered, challenging, indie folk-rock. She mixes avant-garde edge with the accessibility of rural string music, along the way adding healthy dollops of Fairport Convention-era English folk and a psychedelic approach to colors and textures. She sings in the kind of precocious,

childlike voice you either love or hate.

Newsom's music may be an acquired taste, but that hasn't prevented her undeniably unique and powerful artistic vision from connecting with fans across the musical spectrum. Although she calls music nerds "her people," her admirers also include classical musicians, art-rock snobs, indie-rock kids, as well as nerds and obsessives of every age, creed, and color. She's made nerdiness cool, and put the concert harp back on the musical map as something other a piece of history, or a quaint oddity relegated to shimmer, reverb-drenched Celtic music or New Age noodling. Her breakthrough album, *Ys* (pronounced *ease*), from 2006, was the work of an all-star crew. Recorded by Steve Albini and mixed by Jim O'Rourke, it featured arrangements by Van Dyke Parks and has been performed along with the London Symphony Orchestra. Her last release, *Have One on Me* (2010), is a three-disc set—a rare event for an indie label like Chicago's Drag City. Five years later, she's back with a single LP, *Divers*.

Since the release of *Have One on Me*, Newsom has toured relentlessly, married actor-comedian Andy Samberg, and even dipped her toe into acting, appearing as both narrator and actor in Paul Thomas Anderson's latest film, *Inherent Vice*. Although she'd previously appeared as a character in a MGMT video, modeled for Armani, and been drawn by Matt Groening as a Simpson (though she never appeared on the show), but feature film acting was something different.

"There was never a conversation where he said, 'Do you want to be in the movie? Do you want to be on camera?'" Newsom says in the lobby lounge of the Four Seasons Hotel, in midtown Manhattan. "I just got a call at one point from the wardrobe department at Warner Bros., and I was like, 'Oh, I guess...'"

"It was kind of terrifying. I'm a huge fan of Paul Thomas Anderson, and so just the concept of the project was kind of intimidating and scary because I didn't want to mess up something that, you know, I was so excited to be a part of and that I cared so much about."

Newsom found certain commonalities between making films and making records, between being an actor and being a musician. "When we finalized it, the process felt super musical because I would go into the studio with him and he would kind of direct the



voiceover in a way that was completely linked with what was happening on camera. The pacing of it, the loudness, the mood, the pitching of the voice—all of these things needed to sync with or provide counterpoint to the action on camera. They had to be married in a way that felt really connected to music for me. He never said that, but I felt like he was thinking in musical terms."

Newsom began making *Divers* four years ago, when, after repeated nine-week tours, she found herself wanting to be home. "It got to the point, no matter how much I did my laundry, everything smelled like bus. The bus had permeated the fibers. It was like, 'Burn these.'"

Newsom composes her music on the harp, though in recent years she's also gotten proficient on keyboards of all kinds. Accordingly, *Divers* is filled with a plethora of keyboard sounds from an array of esoteric instruments, including a Marxophone (a fretless zither, keyed and strummed like an autoharp), a Neupert clavichord, a Fender Rhodes, a Baldwin Discoverer portable organ and drum machine, an Estey Field Organ (an antique, portable pump organ), a Minimoog synthesizer, and a Roland Juno-106 analog synth.

"My habit, since I was a child—and since I began playing harp, basically—is to write little songs that sort of served as études, in a way. I would write these things to make myself a better harpist. I'd write things that I couldn't play at full speed, and then I'd play them over and over again until I could bring them up to speed. There are little piano sketches on this record that I think came from a similar place."

After two years of writing, Newsom was ready to record basic tracks with Albini. "The first phase is just me in the studio with Steve recording to tape, and that would be harp, just basic vocals—not the harmonies—piano, and, I wanna say, 15 other keyboard instruments."

Newsom's partnership with the

Chicago-based Albini, the former music critic and multi-instrumentalist turned engineer and producer, most famous for his work with Nirvana on *In Utero* and an analog zealot, has proved particularly fruitful on the sonic front. *Divers*, like *Have One on Me*, was recorded on analog tape, bounced to Pro Tools for mixing, then dumped back onto tape for mastering.

"[On my records] I want to hear the acoustic qualities of an instrument, the instrumental characteristics, how those waveforms assign various colors and emotions to the music. So there's everything from that to the way that an instrument is miked, certainly the way it's mixed, and certainly the room it's recorded in. In this case, it varied from song to song. On *Ys*, I wanted to have a sort of unified sonic idea. I wanted to start, sound-wise, with something that was sort of affectless and clean and pure, even, which I think is what Steve Albini does."

"Steve is the best. I'm sure he can do any number of things that he wants to, but as a person who plays acoustic instruments and uses my voice to sing, the reason I would go to Steve Albini is that he makes things sound on recordings like what they sound like. It's not only that he makes things sound like you're sitting in a room listening to them, but he makes it sound like you're sitting in a *reeealllly* nice room listening to them, you know? [big smile, laughter] I think there are some people who can record in a true-to-life way that is like ugly true to life—gritty, and almost documentarian—and I would say he doesn't do that. He records things the way I would like to remember them, with this warm nostalgia suffused throughout."

After *Divers*' basic tracks were complete, another year and a half of working with arrangers and collaborators ensued. Much of the overdubbing on the record, by the eight other musicians involved, was done during the mixing of the album, by longtime Newsom collaborator and *Divers* co-producer Noah Georgeson. In addition to Albini, 13 other recording engineers are credited.

One of Newsom's greatest strengths as a musician is that she seems to actually enjoy the recording process. Referring in one recent interview to the fact that people assume she's a "pixie" because of the instrument she plays, Newsome is anything but. While the combination of her singing voice and



Morrow Audio™
A Sound Decision

MAY YOUR SOUND BE MERRY & BRIGHT.

— TAKE THE MORROW CHALLENGE —

Morrow Audio is proud to create hand crafted, custom made, high-end cables designed to perfectly capture every nuance of sound with less distortion, better signal flow and absolute perfection with every listen. Can your current cable do the same?

Trade Up To Morrow by trading in your existing brand for Morrow within 60 days. Save 40% immediately and experience beautifully immersive sound. If you don't love the world of flawless sound quality provided, keep yours and ship our cables back for a full refund.

Every Morrow Audio cable is fully equipped with SSI Technology™ and comes with a lifetime performance guarantee.

BEGIN YOUR EXPERIENCE NOW AT **MORROWAUDIO.COM.**

"These cables not only exceeded my expectations, but also surpass that of cables costing significantly more. As I continue my cable upgrade process, the Morrow Audio products will be my only choice." – Jim L., USA

Ayre?... Really?



CODEx



Balanced

1/R

2/L

Ayre

Yes, Really!

But the Codex is so small it could sit on my desk-top... Yep, and it is a DAC + headphone amp + preamp, perfect for a desktop or small system.

I bet it uses op-amps though... Nope, It's a fully discrete design. And staying true to the music, it doesn't use any feedback either.

Then it must use a switching power supply... The Codex uses a pure analog, linear supply, with ultra-quiet, high-speed discrete regulators so the music jumps to life.

Yeah, but it's only USB, right? Actually it has optical and USB inputs, allowing you to connect both your computer and another A/V source.

It's so inexpensive, they must be making it over... Nope, still built from start to finish by hand in Boulder, Colorado. With U.S. made parts for a lifetime of enjoyment.

Sounds like I should take a listen... Cool, let's go!

www.ayre.com/dealers.htm

her instrument of choice may fooled some into thinking she's a willowy waif, there's a whip smart steeliness underneath her perky manner that knows exactly what it wants. Although it's easy to imagine her being tough to work with, she says she enjoys collaborating. Although "formal arrangements add a lot of time to the process," Newsom nevertheless worked with eight arrangers on *Divers*, including Nico Muhly (Bjork, Sufjan Stevens), David Longstreth of The Dirty Projectors, and her brother, drummer Peter Newsom.

"To be a good arranger is a very specific gift. It's a weird magic," she says, sipping a cup of strong black tea. "All of these arrangers are also composers, they also write their own songs. They are all distinct creative voices in their own right. But to be a great arranger, you also have to have the ability to subvert your ego and identity as a writer beneath your wish to hear the person you are working with in terms of what they want a song to be.

"The huge pool of collaborators here did mean that I was having a lot of the same broad-overview conversations again and again. With a single arranger, you only talk about narrative and thematic . . . stuff [laughs], for lack of a better word, like once: 'Here's what this record is about, here's how I want this record to feel.' And then you get into the detail work, and of course that's the same whether you're working with one person or ten people—except, I would say, for the disorientation and slight recovery time that comes from constantly adjusting to different people's subjectivity when it comes to language [another laugh]. Everyone's language is subjective, but within that, I think you can orient yourself to the way one person thinks about music, and they can orient themselves to the way that you think about it. But when you're working with a lotta lotta lotta people, that orientation happens again and again.

"While that seems, in a way, kind of crazy, it really felt important for this record, because there's a lot that unites the songs, and there are a lot of threads that run through them, narratively and harmonically, and so I really wanted to balance that, I guess, with an instrumental palette that just varied constantly, not only in terms of the instrumentation but in terms of the character of the instrumentation. It's not just about having different instruments on each song. It's about com-



THERE ARE SO MANY VARIABLES, BUT THE MAIN THING IS THAT I WANTED EACH SONG TO INHABIT ITS OWN SPECIFIC WORLD.

positional voices varying, 'cause every composer or arranger treats the violin a little differently. Although that's a little reductive in and of itself, because he or she might treat the violin differently not only based on who he or she is, but also based on what the song is, and what the conversations are that we've had. There are so many variables, but the main thing is that I wanted each song to inhabit its own specific world. I wanted the air to smell different. I wanted the quality of the light to be different. I wanted the ground to feel different underfoot."

Asked whether having so many minds working on one record has ever uncovered surprises—has ever turned a song in a direction completely different from what she originally intended—Newsom leans back to ponder. "On a detail level, I get surprised sometimes. Sometimes I think, 'Oh, I want a contrapuntal brass cluster here, from this section to this section,' and it just turns out I'm wrong. What it really needs is a synth, or nothing, or, you know, a timpani part—it's kind of endless. But I don't think it's ever happened that someone's written the opposite of what I asked for and then I was, 'Oh, cool, let's do that instead.'"

To anyone who listens carefully, it's obvious that Newsom has learned how to make records that sound good. More than most musicians it seems, she enjoys and has spent time understanding that process. "When I first started making music, I thought of myself so much as a writer and performer that,

in a way, the recording and mixing of it was sort of like, 'Well, that's not my area. I'll work with someone who's really good at it, and what I do is write and play the parts.'

"In the case of Ys, Jim O'Rourke's mixing style is like, take six hours on his own while I'm sitting outside on the couch reading a book. He would finally let me in, and get a round of notes, and then it might mean starting over if it wasn't right. But he wanted to be able to make his complete take on the song before I would weigh in, and I was okay with that. For that record, it made sense to do it that way. And by the way, Noah could very easily do that. There's a version of this record that I think would be really good, that would just be the one where Noah locks me out for eight hours and mixes it himself, and then I come in and give notes."

Newsom's knowledge of recording extends to specifics. "I have pet peeves, though they are kinda hard to describe. Like, there's a punchiness in the high end of the harp that I really like to avoid. It's hard, and Steve is one of the only people who manages to get this sort of corona around the shape of each note and the attack, in a sort of a crystalline way—but not a punchy way, not a popping way.

"I also have strong opinions about the sustain on the piano, 'cause it's not a harp, and so I don't want it to just be an endless, resonating body. But I also don't want it to be chopped off in an artificial-feeling way—which, again, basically comes down to making the piano sound like you're in the room with it. I think a lot of piano recordings do something or other to exaggerate characteristics about the piano that are there, but they're not perceived by the ear the way they are perceived by recording devices, and again, Steve is amazing for that.

"I also have real pet peeves about drum sounds and guitar sounds, but I don't exactly know how to explain it. I know when I hear it. There have been long, long mixing projects where Noah Georgeson, who mixed the record with me, would be hunting down some characteristic in, say, the drum recording to, like, take out this one frequency in a way I can't articulate, but I didn't like. Not in the performance or anything, but in the way it was sitting in the mix.

"This record sounds exactly as I would hope and as I wanted, but there are a lot of phases to get it there." ■

2012 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER!

REGA RP6 TURNTABLE ▶ WITH REGA EXACT CARTRIDGE

ONLY \$1990.00

"I've had many turntables,
some costing tens of
thousands of dollars; but I've
never had a combination
that made me want to
listen to records more"

- ANDY SCHAUB,
Positive Feedback
May/Jun 2012



WITHOUT CARTRIDGE ONLY \$1495.00



REGA RP10 TURNTABLE
\$5,495



REGA RP8 TURNTABLE
\$2,995



REGA RP3 TURNTABLE \$895
*W/ELYS \$1095



REGA RP78 TURNTABLE
\$645.00 *78 RPM ONLY



REGA RP1 PERFORMANCE PACK
\$640



REGA RP1 TURNTABLE
\$449



Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

**WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION
OF TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES, AND NEEDLES!**

JERRY RASKIN'S NEEDLEDOCTOR

Established 1979

WWW.NEEDLEDOCTOR.COM

ALL NEW RESONANCE OPTIMIZED EBONY

NEW CLEARAUDIO MAESTRO V2 EBONY ▶

ONLY \$1200.00

"As musical as they come, the **MAESTRO V2 EBONY** should be required listening for moving-magnet and moving-coil fans alike"

"Clearaudio has crafted a better cartridge from every sonic perspective."

- NEIL GADER, *The Absolute Sound*
40th Anniversary Issue, July 2013



CLEARAUDIO DA VINCI V2
PHONO CARTRIDGE **\$5,500**



CLEARAUDIO STRADIVARI V2
PHONO CARTRIDGE **\$3,750**



CLEARAUDIO CONCERTO V2
PHONO CARTRIDGE **\$2,750**



CLEARAUDIO TALISMANN V2 GOLD
PHONO CARTRIDGE **\$1,750**



CLEARAUDIO CONCEPT MC
PHONO CARTRIDGE **\$1,000**



CLEARAUDIO VIRTUOSO V2 EBONY
PHONO CARTRIDGE **\$900**



CLEARAUDIO ARTIST V2 EBONY
PHONO CARTRIDGE **\$600**



CLEARAUDIO CONCEPT V2 MM
PHONO CARTRIDGE **\$250**



Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

**WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION
OF TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES, AND NEEDLES!**

JERRY RASKIN'S NEEDLEDOCTOR

Established 1979

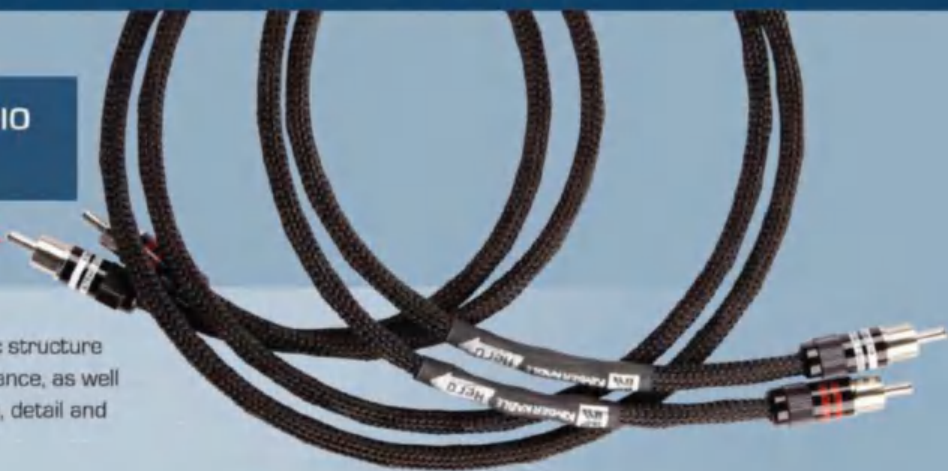
WWW.NEEDLEDOCTOR.COM

INDUSTRY LEGEND!

KIMBER KABLE HERO AUDIO INTERCONNECTS ▶

ONLY \$219/ meter pair

"Correctly presenting the harmonic structure and emotion of the actual performance, as well as giving you holographic imaging, detail and bass impact."



KIMBER KABLE

HANDCRAFTING CABLES SINCE 1979



KIMBER KABLE
TIMBRE AUDIO
INTERCONNECTS

\$147 meter pair

KIMBER KABLE
PBJ AUDIO
INTERCONNECTS

\$117 meter pair

KIMBER KABLE
TONIK AUDIO
INTERCONNECTS

\$84 meter pair

KIMBER KABLE 8TC SPEAKER CABLE

\$413 8ft pair

KIMBER KABLE 4TC SPEAKER CABLE

\$235 8ft pair

KIMBER KABLE 8VS SPEAKER CABLE

\$193.80 8ft pair



Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

**WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION
OF TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES, AND NEEDLES!**

DYNAMIC, TRANSPARENT, & PROFOUNDLY MUSICAL

NEW ROGUE AUDIO SPHINX INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER ▼

ONLY \$1295.00 (Available in Black or Silver)

Needle Doctor is pleased to announce that Rogue Audio's best selling integrated amplifier just got a facelift! A stylish groove in the faceplate will commemorate the latest technical revisions. The new Sphinx will include:

- Improved 1W headphone circuit
- Improved phono circuit with 6dB additional gain (same phono as Cronus II)
- Addition of a mute function on the remote (Sphinx w/remote \$1395)
- Lower noise floor



ENTIRELY BUILT AND DESIGNED IN THE USA



**ROGUE AUDIO'S GEAR IS ENTIRELY DESIGNED
 AND HAND-BUILT IN THE USA**



NEW ROGUE AUDIO RP-5 PREAMPLIFIER
 w/ Tube Headphone Amp & MM/MC Phono Pre
\$3,495



**NEW ROGUE AUDIO
 CRONUS MAGNUM II**
\$2,495



**ROGUE AUDIO PERSEUS MAGNUM LINE/
 PHONO PREAMP**
\$2,195



**ROGUE AUDIO STEREO 100
 POWER AMP**
\$3,495



**ROGUE AUDIO
 PHARAOH INTEGRATED AMP**
\$3,495



ROGUE AUDIO ATLAS POWER AMP
\$1,995



Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
 Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

**WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION
 OF TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES, AND NEEDLES!**

JOHN ATKINSON

YG Acoustics Carmel 2

LOUDSPEAKER

For me, one of the highlights of 2013 was being able to live with the Sonja 1.3, the flagship loudspeaker model from Colorado-based YG Acoustics. I reviewed this tall, massive, three-enclosure tour de force of a design, which costs \$106,800/pair, in July 2013,¹ and was not surprised when, for the December 2013 issue, *Stereophile's* writers voted it one of the magazine's two Loudspeakers of the Year. So when I was asked last spring if I wanted to review the new version of the smallest and least-expensive model in YGA's lineup, the request fell on receptive ears.

Description

The Carmel 2 is a two-way floorstanding design costing \$24,300/pair. Like all of Yoav Geva's designs, it uses proprietary drive-units, premium-quality parts, and a complex enclosure constructed from CNC-machined aluminum panels. Standing 39" high on its spikes and weighing 76 lbs, the Carmel 2 combines a 7" woofer with a 1" soft-dome tweeter. The woofer, made entirely in-house, has a cone machined from aircraft-grade aluminum billet, hence YGA's name of BilletCore for this driver. (See my Sonja 1.3 review for a fuller description of the company's technologies.) The cone is the same as that used in the midrange unit of YGA's three-way Hailey model, but here the driver is optimized to reproduce both low and midrange frequencies. Low-frequency distortion will inevitably be higher with a two-way than a three-way design, but YGA says that the Carmel 2 woofer's distortion is very low, and close to the noise floor of the anechoic chamber at Canada's NRC, where YGA does the final testing of its prototypes.

The ForgeCore tweeter, identical to that used in the Hailey and Sonja, features a chassis machined in-house by YGA and is set back within a shallow waveguide with a conical flare. The drivers are crossed over at 1.75kHz, and YGA's DualCoherent topology is claimed to maintain a flat response and near-zero relative phase in the crossover region, similar to the Sonja. The complex circuit features toroidal air-core inductors CNC-wound in-house, and which YGA calls ToroAir. However, YGA says that there are very

few components in the signal path, to preserve the sonic transparency of a simple crossover.

The construction of the sealed, three-chamber enclosure is also complex. YGA uses what it calls FocusedElimination to avoid resonances. Whereas the original Carmel's enclosure was straight-sided, the Carmel 2 has a gracefully curved front baffle and sidewall, all CNC-machined from aluminum sheet as in the Sonja (though the Sonja uses a dual-shell, box-in-box construction). The Carmel 2's front baffle is 1.38" (35mm) thick.

Overall, two Carmel 2s comprise some 1020 parts, almost all of which—even the handsome binding posts—are made in-house. I was told that the Carmel 2 requires about 34 hours of CNC machine time per pair, of which 20 hours are devoted to milling, 11 to turning, and 3 to winding coils and polishing. The result is an elegant piece of audio furniture.

Setup

Despite its size and complexity, YGA's Sonja 1.3 had been relatively straightforward to set up in my room; the Carmel 2 proved more problematic.

When you position speakers in a room, you want the woofers' distances from the floor, the nearest sidewall, and the wall behind the speakers to be maximally different from each other, to ensure that the low-frequency room resonances are evenly spread out. (As a rule of thumb, this will be achieved if you make the difference between each distance and the next smaller distance conform to the Golden ratio of 1.618:1.) Yet the Carmel 2's single woofer is 29" from the floor—and, with the YGAs set up in the positions where the KEF Blade 2s had worked well when I reviewed them for the June issue,² that was too close to the distance of each woofer from its sidewall. As a consequence, the midbass was lumpy, and while I didn't expect the Carmel 2 to have extended low frequencies, they were missing in action.

When you buy a pair of relatively expensive speakers, the dealer should be responsible for setting them up in your

1 See www.stereophile.com/content/yg-acoustics-sonja-13-loudspeaker.

2 See www.stereophile.com/content/kef-blade-two-loudspeaker.

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Two-way, floorstanding loudspeaker with sealed enclosure. Drive-units: 1" (25mm) ForgeCore soft-dome tweeter, 7" (178mm) BilletCore aluminum-cone woofer. Crossover

frequency: 1.75kHz. Frequency range: 32Hz–40kHz. Sensitivity: 87dB/2.83V/m. Nominal impedance: 4 ohms. Minimum impedance: 3.5 ohms. **Dimensions** 39" (991mm)

H by 9" (230mm) W by 13" (310mm) D. Weight: 76 lbs (34kg). **Finish** Anodized aluminum. **Serial numbers of units reviewed** Not found. **Price** \$24,300/pair. Approximate

number of dealers: 15. **Manufacturer** YG Acoustics LLC, 4941 Allison Street, Unit 10, Arvada, CO 80002. Tel: (801) 726-3887. Fax: (303) 420-0156. Web: www.yg-acoustics.com.



**Overall, two
Carmel 2s comprise
some 1020 parts.**

HEAR IT RIGHT AT BROOKS BERDAN



STRIKE A CHORD

When you combine the astonishing resolution and transparency of the **Estelon XB** with the tone, dynamics and control of the **Chord Electronics SPM 1400** the result is a mind-blowing "you-are-there" experience. Hear this striking combination in our Palladium demonstration room.



CALIFORNIA'S PREMIER AUDIO STORE With our 7,000 square foot retail store, seven superbly appointed listening rooms and twenty-seven years experience setting up the world's finest audio systems, Brooks Berdan is the West Coast's leader in high-end audio. Visit the experts at Brooks Berdan and you'll hear it right!

AUDEZE • AUDIOQUEST • AURALIC • CARDAS • CHORD ELECTRONICS • DYNAVECTOR
ESTELON • GRADO • JADIS • JL AUDIO • KUBALA-SOSNA • LIGHT HARMONIC • LYRA
MAGICO • MANLEY • MCINTOSH • ORACLE • ORTOFON • ROGUE • ROKSAN • SCHEU
SME • SOUNDSMITH • SPENDOR • THORENS • VPI • WOLFE CINEMA • AND MORE

room, but in this case, YGA's Dick Diamond and Kerry St. James visited to optimize the positions of the Carmel 2s. Diamond played a selection of recordings with which he was familiar, and kept shifting each speaker until he heard the transition between the low midbass and the mid-upper bass smoothing out. He then adjusted the speakers' toe-ins until the central image was solidly and stably defined but the top octave wasn't being emphasized. That toe-in ended up being around 5°, and the speaker positions were asymmetrical. Although each speaker was 7' 2" from the wall behind it, the right speaker was 4' 7" from the books that line the sidewall nearest it, while the left speaker was 3' 2" from the LPs that lined its sidewall. (All distances were measured from the woofer dustcaps.)

Even then, with the Carmel 2s driven by Pass Labs XA60.5 monoblocks and fed directly from a PS Audio DirectStream DAC, the speakers sounded on the lean side, with a little too much top-octave energy. Diamond explained that while these review samples had been played for many hours back at the factory, the time spent in shipping probably meant that their woofers needed more break-in. We spent the next couple of hours listening to a wide variety of music, and yes, the midbass began to free up and the lean quality decreased. These changes continued for the next two weeks of my noncritical listening until, finally, the Carmel 2s' bass balance plateaued.



The woofer, made entirely in-house, has a cone machined from aircraft-grade aluminum billet.

Amplifiers

Other than the presence of its lowest-frequency diagonal mode, at around 32Hz, I have optimized my room's acoustics for low-frequency articulation rather than bloom.³ So even though the Carmel 2s' bass had loosened

up as much as it was going to, and even with the Pass Labs amplifiers and their rather soft bass character, the YGAs still sounded more lean than generous in the lows. Changing to the MBL Corona C15 monoblocks tightened up the bass—a step in the wrong direction—though the top-octave balance was now smoother. Replacing the MBLs with Para-

3 Rather than absorptive damping, I have primarily used diffractive surfaces (books, LPs, RPG Abfusers) and strategically placed ASC Tube Traps to get an even reverb time of around 250ms from the lower midrange through to the mid-treble, above which the reverb time shortens due to the increased absorption of the furnishings. Voices sound uncolored in my room, but overall, it's drier than the typical American home's living room.

MEASUREMENTS

I used DRA Labs' MLSSA system and a calibrated DPA 4006 microphone to measure the YG Acoustics Carmel 2's frequency response in the farfield, and an Earthworks QTC-40 for the nearfield and spatially averaged room responses.

The Carmel 2's voltage sensitivity is specified as 87dB/2.83V/m; my estimate was less than that, at 84dB(B)/2.83V/m. The impedance is specified as 4 ohms, with a minimum magnitude of 3.5 ohms. Fig.1 shows my measurement of the YGA's impedance magnitude (solid trace) and electrical phase angle (dotted). The impedance drops below 4 ohms only between 150 and 400Hz, and the minimum value is

3.68 ohms at 220Hz. While the phase angle is occasionally high, the amplitude is also high at those frequencies, ameliorating any problems. Note the increasingly capacitive phase angle below the sealed-box woofer-tuning frequency of 60Hz, which suggests there is a high-value series capacitor in the woofer feed.

There is a suspicious-looking bump in the impedance traces around 150Hz. However, when I tried to examine the Carmel 2's enclosure for the presence of vibrational modes, I wasn't able to get my plastic-tape accelerometer to adhere sufficiently well to the aluminum panels to get a consistent reading. But sweeping a sinewave tone

up and down as I listened through a stethoscope revealed the presence on the sidewalls of some high-Q, high-amplitude resonances between 600 and 800Hz. These modes were also present at a lower level on the front baffle. The affected areas seemed small, and the frequency and Q of these resonances will work against their having any effect on sound quality. But I was surprised to find them at all, given the sophisticated design of the Carmel 2's aluminum enclosure. I suspect these might be the reason for the slight degree of coloration I heard in speaking voices and solo piano.

Turning to the acoustic measurements, the traces above 300Hz in fig.2 show the individual responses of the Carmel 2's drive-units on the tweeter axis at 50". The blue trace below 350Hz is the woofer's output measured in the nearfield. You can see that the woofer's response is extraordinarily flat over its entire passband, meeting ± 1 dB limits between 50Hz and 1kHz, and rolling off at 18dB/octave below that range. So why, then, did I feel that the Carmel 2 sounded a bit lean? A nearfield measurement assumes what is called a "2pi" acoustic environment—ie, one in which the drive-unit

Fig.1 YG Acoustics Carmel 2, electrical impedance (solid) and phase (dashed) (2 ohms/vertical div.)

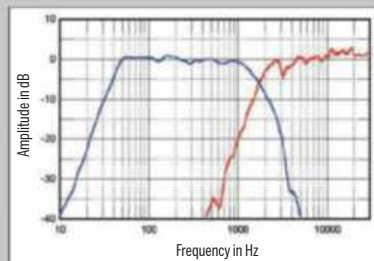
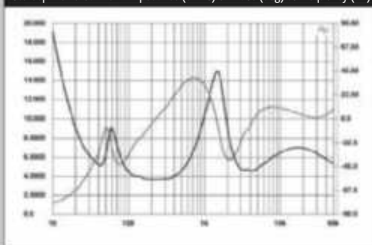


Fig.2 YG Acoustics Carmel 2, acoustic crossover on tweeter axis at 50", corrected for microphone response with nearfield response of woofer plotted below 350Hz.

INTRODUCING Venom Series Signal Cables

VENOM Series Signal and Speaker Cables represent fifteen years of Shunyata Research's evolved technical innovation and custom-parts engineering. The over-reaching goal was to create products that possess peerless quality and performance, *at real-world prices*. You'll find that the finest in signal cable performance need not cost a fortune.

INTERCONNECT FEATURES

- OHNO — Continuous Cast Copper
- VTX™ Conductors (*hollow-core*)
- Premium Shunyata XLR and RCA Connectors
- 100% coverage braided shield
- Stunning Aesthetic
- Very Flexible Cables
- Incredible Value
- **US Retail: \$295**

SPEAKER CABLE FEATURES

- OFE 101 Certified Copper
- VTX™ Conductors (*hollow-core*)
- 100% coverage electro-static shielding
- STIS — Interchangeable Speaker Cable Terminals
- Stunning Aesthetic
- Very Flexible Cables
- Incredible Value
- **US Retail: \$595**



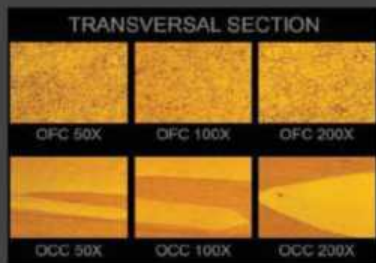
Shunyata XLR Connectors



STIS Interchangeable Terminals



Shunyata RCA Connectors



OHNO - Continuous Cast Copper



VTX™ Conductors



OFE 101 Certified Copper



sound Halo JC 1 monoblocks, which Michael Fremer had described as being “perhaps a tad polite,” the YGA speakers sounded a touch too vigorous in the midrange, and again, the Parasound’s superb control of the bass emphasized the leanness of sound. Of all the solid-state amplifiers I had to hand, it was the softer-sounding treble of the Arcam FMJ P49, which I reviewed in November, that worked best with the Carmel 2s, bringing the midrange and treble into an overall neutral balance.

If you’ve been following my loudspeaker reviews for any length of time, you’ll have noted that I almost never use tube amplification. I’m always suspicious that a typical tubed design, with its relatively high source impedance, acts as a suboptimal tone control. But as none of the amplifiers I had were hitting the Carmel 2s’ sweet spot, I got out of storage the sample of the PrimaLuna DiaLogue Premium HP integrated amplifier that Robert Deutsch had reviewed in December 2014.⁴ The PrimaLuna offers a fairly low output impedance, especially from its 4 ohm output transformer tap in triode mode: It measured 1.1 ohms from 20Hz to 1kHz, rising to 1.33 ohms at 20kHz. Accordingly, I hooked up the YGAs to the DiaLogue Premium HP’s 4 ohm taps, set the PS Audio’s volume control to its maximum so I could control volume with the PrimaLuna, switched the amplifier to triode mode—which RD had felt sounded “more laid-back,

more relaxed”—and sat back to listen . . .

Listening

. . . and listen. And then listen some more.

Even though the Carmel 2s’ delivery of low frequencies was still ungenerous, the PrimaLuna amplifier proved best at getting them to sing with a single, unified voice that was evenly matched in character from the midbass through to the top of the audioband. Yes, with “Last Train Home,” from Pat Metheny’s *Still Life (Talking)* (ALAC file ripped from CD, Geffen 24145-2), the repeated eighth-notes on bass guitar weren’t as well defined with the PrimaLuna as they’d been with any of the solid-state amplifiers I’d tried, but there was now enough midbass to minimize the impression of leanness, and the low frequencies blended seamlessly with the midrange. The bass guitar in “I Put a Spell on You,” from Jeff Beck’s *Emotion & Commotion* (ALAC file ripped from CD, Atco R2 523695), sounded a bit gruff, but the YGAs kept Joss Stone’s gutsy voice at 100.

On first impression, the Carmel 2’s midrange was superbly natural; it certainly sounded that way with many recordings of voices. Having heard Lyn Stanley sing in person at an audio show, I was prompted to buy the DSD64

⁴ See www.stereophile.com/content/primaluna-dialogue-premium-hp-integrated-amplifier.

measurements, continued

is mounted in a baffle that extends to infinity in all directions. A speaker that has a truly flat response in the usual “4pi” space will therefore appear to have a boosted upper-bass output with a nearfield measurement, the center frequency of that boost depending on the physical dimensions of the speaker and the woofer tuning. As the Carmel 2’s nearfield response in fig.2 appears to be maximally flat, its woofer alignment must therefore be overdamped.

Higher in frequency in fig.2, the crossover is set to the specified 1.75kHz and the acoustic slopes are asymmetrical, the woofer (blue trace) rolling off at 24dB/octave but the tweeter (red) at 18dB/octave. The tweeter’s output is also flat, though

a slight discontinuity can be seen between 2.8 and 4.5kHz. This discontinuity is also evident in fig.3, which shows the Carmel 2’s farfield response averaged across a 30° horizontal window centered on the tweeter axis. The Carmel 2’s plot of lateral dispersion (fig.4) suggests that the discontinuity continues off axis, and that the slight peak between 2 and 3kHz is exacerbated by a slight lack of energy to the speaker’s sides in the same region. The YGA’s output becomes quite directional above 15kHz or so. However, its vertical-dispersion plot (fig.5) reveals that the Carmel 2’s balance hardly changes over a wide ($\pm 10^\circ$) window centered on the tweeter axis, and that a suckout at the crossover frequency begins to appear only 15° above that axis.

Fig.6 shows the Carmel 2’s spatially averaged response (red trace) in my room with, for reference, the response of the KEF Blade Two in the same room (blue).¹ Both traces were generated by averaging 20 $\frac{1}{6}$ -octave-smoothed spectra, taken for the left and right speakers individually using SMUG-Software’s FuzzMeasure 3.0 program and a 96kHz sample rate, in a vertical rectangular grid 36" wide by 18" high and centered on the positions of my ears. This mostly eliminates the room acoustic’s effects, and integrates the direct sound of the speakers with the in-room energy to give a curve that I have found correlates reasonably well with a speaker’s perceived tonal balance.

¹ See www.stereophile.com/content/kef-blade-two-loudspeaker-measurements.

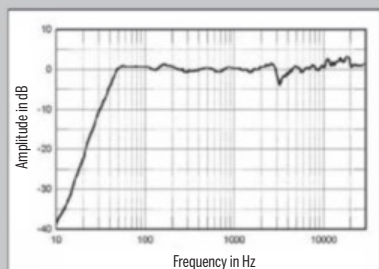


Fig.3 YG Acoustics Carmel 2, anechoic response on tweeter axis at 50°, averaged across 30° horizontal window and corrected for microphone response, with nearfield response of woofer plotted below 300Hz.

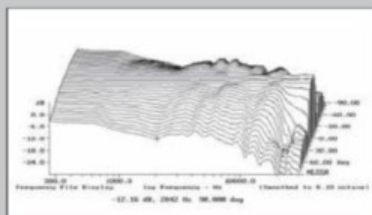


Fig.4 YG Acoustics Carmel 2, lateral response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 90–5° off axis, reference response, differences in response 5–90° off axis.

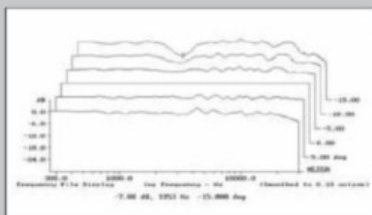


Fig.5 YG Acoustics Carmel 2, vertical response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 15–5° above axis, reference response, differences in response 5–10° below axis.

Soul Mates



www.rotel.com

It is rare to find two audio components so perfectly complementary; where each enhances the other to provide an overall higher level of performance. The new RC-1590 preamplifier and RB-1590 stereo power amplifier from Rotel have been engineered to do just that. Although both will provide superb fidelity with other mates, together they achieve a level of musical synergy that is extraordinary.

While fidelity is always paramount, Rotel engineers understood that certain features were required to accommodate the needs of contemporary music listeners. For example, the RC-1590 stereo preamplifier is replete with all of the inputs, outputs, and control functions required for enjoying all of today's digital and analog source sources, including 24/192 PC-USB, iOS USB, AptX Bluetooth, balanced analog input/output and even a superb MM phono stage.

The RB-1590 Class AB stereo power amplifier offers both balanced and unbalanced connections as well as a 12-volt trigger to simplify system turn-on. It is a benchmark of power and control, conservatively rated at 350 watts per channel into 8 ohms, both channels driven. The RB-1590 has plenty of muscle to deliver visceral dynamics, while being capable of resolving the tiniest musical details. Circuit topography has been configured in a true monoblock design, ensuring maximum signal separation and better stereo imaging.

To hear these two new perfectly matched stereo components, please visit your nearest authorized Rotel dealer.



RC-1590 Stereo Preamplifier
RB-1590 Stereo Class A/B Power Amplifier



download of the chanteuse's *Potions: From the 50's* (A.T. Music/Acoustic Sounds). Not only is this an immaculate-sounding recording—engineered and mixed by Al Schmitt, mastered by Bernie Grundman—but Stanley really gets into some classics from the Great American Songbook, such as “Lullaby of Birdland,” “Cry Me a River,” and “Misty.” But my favorite track is the old hit by Leiber and Stoller, “Love Potion #9.” The Carmel 2's clean highs gave the cymbals and triangle a superbly real quality, the definition in the lower octaves allowed the double bass to speak clearly, and Stanley's husky alto was deliciously present in the room. And Otis Redding's barking baritone on his *Otis Blue: Otis Redding Sings Soul* (mono 24/192 FLAC file, Atco/Pono Music) thrilled me as much as it had when I bought the vinyl, 50 years ago.

But with some spoken-word recordings, such as David Wilson's commentaries on the high-resolution files of his reissued Wilson Audiophile-label recordings, I became aware of a slightly resonant quality. Similarly, naturally recorded solo-piano recordings, such as Robert Silverman's traversal of the two Rachmaninoff sonatas (CD, Stereophile STPH019-2), had a little too much upper-midrange bloom. I put on a recording I know really well: Richard Lehnert's spoken introductions to the “Channel Identification” and “Channel Phasing” tracks on *Editor's Choice* (CD, Stereophile STPH016-2), and yes, there *was* a touch of midrange overhang in the sound of his voice. It wasn't audible with jazz

vocal recordings, where it was masked by everything else in the mix, but recordings of solo piano and unaccompanied spoken voice are ruthlessly revealing.

Playing pink noise, too, is very revealing of colorations, and here the Carmel 2 did well. With the dual-mono pink-noise track from *Editor's Choice*, I heard no change as I moved my head above and below the tweeter axis. However, I could hear a narrow band of brightness in the mid-treble that slightly emphasized the fret buzz of my Fender bass in the first two tracks of *Editor's Choice*. The central image of the noise signal was narrow at all frequencies and spatially well defined, confirming the excellent stereo imaging I experienced with the Carmel 2s.

The low-frequency warble tones on *Editor's Choice* began shelving down below 125Hz, and while the 50Hz band was relatively strong, the tones at 40Hz and below sounded increasingly weak. That impression was confirmed with the half-step-spaced tonebursts on this disc, though these did speak very cleanly. Therefore, after having finished my listening, I was surprised to read in a review of the Carmel 2, in the October 2015 *Hi-Fi Plus*, that the speaker offered “surprisingly deep, powerful, and extended bass.” Yes, something like the sampled kick drum in “Angel Echoes,” from Fourtet's *There Is Love in You* (ALAC file ripped from CD, Domino), sounded punchy through the YGAs—but, like the double bass in the Lyn Stanley recording, kick drums have their most energy in the midbass, where the Carmel 2 can

measurements, continued

Both speakers offer very even in-room responses. However, the YGA has a slight excess of energy evident in the mid-treble compared with the KEF, and while the Blade Two's extended response significantly excites the lowest-frequency resonant mode in my room (ca 32Hz), the Carmel 2's low-frequency output is both shelved down and less even. (The bump at 150Hz and the slight trough centered on 200Hz present in both traces are most likely room effects that have not been ameliorated by the spatial averaging.) This graph does correlate with what I heard from the YGA. Interestingly, given the improvement that I found in the Carmel 2's low-frequency balance when I

replaced the solid-state amplifiers with the tubed PrimaLuna, the change in the in-room response below 150Hz was less than 1dB.

In the time domain, the Carmel 2's step response on the tweeter axis (fig.7) indicates that both drive-units are connected in the same, positive acoustic polarity, and that the decay of the tweeter's step blends relatively smoothly with the start of the woofer's step. This suggests both an optimal crossover topology and that the setback of the tweeter has been well managed. However, there is the hint of a reflection of the tweeter's output around 100 μ s later, which might possibly be from the circular edge of

the waveguide. Even so, other than a slight degree of delayed energy at the frequency of the on-axis suckout at the bottom of the tweeter's passband, the YGA's cumulative spectral-decay plot (fig.8) is impressively clean.

Overall, the YGA Carmel 2's measured performance indicates impressive engineering, both in the overall system design and in the proprietary drive-units. That quasi-anechoic response is one of the flattest I have ever measured, rivaled only by YGA's Sonja 1.3 and KEF's Blade Two. But choosing the optimal low-frequency alignment for a relatively small two-way design is always tricky. The Carmel 2 maximizes low-frequency transparency and articulation at the expense of body to its sound.—John Atkinson

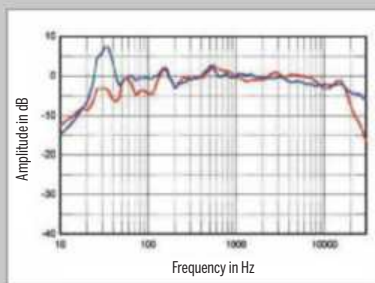


Fig.6 YG Acoustics Carmel 2, spatially averaged, 1/6-octave response in JA's listening room (red); and of KEF Blade Two (blue).

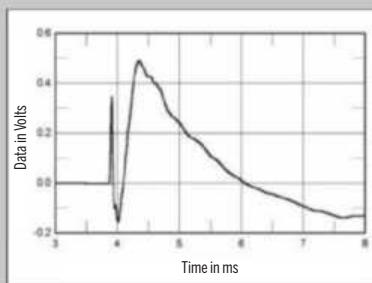


Fig.7 YG Acoustics Carmel 2, step response on tweeter axis at 50° (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).

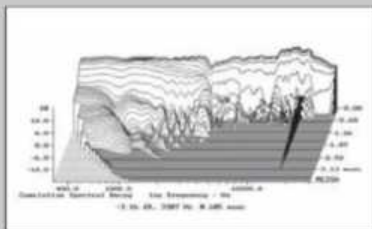


Fig.8 YG Acoustics Carmel 2, cumulative spectral-decay plot on tweeter axis at 50° (0.15ms risetime).



BLUESOUND
IS THE SOUND OF
THE NEW PLAYLIST
ON REPEAT.

BLUESOUND IS THE PREMIUM WIRELESS HIGH RESOLUTION MULTI-ROOM HIFI SYSTEM
DISCOVER LIVING HIFI AND THE ALL-NEW GEN 2 PRODUCT FAMILY AT **BLUESOUND.COM**

handle it. So, as for the YGAs' bass performance: Clean, articulate, expressive, and tuneful? Yes. Extended? Not really.

Having said that, when I played "Limit to Your Love," from James Blake (CD, A&M), the dropped-bass synth notes were more audible than I'd expected. The Carmel 2s' woofers were vibrating alarmingly with this track, even at modest SPLs, so perhaps some nonlinear content was aiding audibility.

To put this into context: With most recordings of rock and orchestral classical music, the Carmel 2s excelled. They handled with aplomb the bass, drums, and guitar power chords in "Bullet with Butterfly Wings," from Smashing Pumpkins' (*Rotten Apples*) *The Smashing Pumpkins Greatest Hits* (256kbps MP3 download, Virgin), and successfully projected the sheer magnificence of Emil Gilels's performance of Brahms's Piano Concerto 2, with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Eugen Jochum (ALAC files ripped from CD, Deutsche Grammophon). In the latter, the horn motif above the whispered piano-arpeggio response sounded as mysterious as I have heard it in my system, and the orchestra's ensuing declamation of the theme sent shivers down my spine.

"Shenandoah," from Bill Frisell's live album *East/West* (ALAC file ripped from CD, Elektra Nonesuch), played to all the Carmel 2's strengths. The filigree textures of Frisell's electric guitar and guitar loops were exquisitely reproduced, Viktor Krauss's superbly defined double bass had sufficient weight to be convincing, the treble textures of Kenny Wollesen's cymbals and snare were well differentiated, and, as the arrangement builds to greater complexity and volume, all of these threads remained clear. The YGA speakers' stable, accurate imaging placed me back in Yoshi's, in Oakland, California—a club I have visited only once, but the memory of which has stayed with me over the years.

Conclusions

To a greater or smaller extent, all speakers editorialize. One reason *Stereophile's* writers list the recordings they use to reach their review conclusions is that the sonic character of the product being tested dictates what music is played. With the YG Acoustics Carmel 2, I found I was playing more rock and jazz and less solo piano; and, in classical, more orchestral than vocal music. I was choosing the recordings that

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Analog Sources Linn Sondek LP12 turntable with Lingo power supply, Linn Ekos tonearm, Linn Arkiv B cartridge.

Digital Sources Antipodes DX Reference music server; Ayre Acoustics C-5xe^{MP} universal player; Apple 2.7GHz i7 Mac mini running OS10.10.1, iTunes 11, Pure Music 2.0, Audirvana Plus 1.5.10; PS Audio PerfectWave DirectStream D/A converter; dCS Vivaldi upsampling D/A system; AudioQuest JitterBug, UpTone Audio ReGen USB cleaner-uppers; Ayre Acoustics QA-9 USB A/D converter.

Preamplification Channel D Seta L phono preamplifier.

Power Amplifiers MBL Corona C15, Parasound Halo JC 1, Pass Labs XA60.5 (all monoblocks); Arcam FMJ P49.

Integrated amplifier PrimaLuna DiaLogue Premium HP.

Cables Digital: AudioQuest Coffee USB, Kubala-Sosna Elation! AES/EBU, Transparent USB (with dCS Vivaldi). Interconnect: AudioQuest Wild Blue, Cardas Clear (both balanced); AudioQuest Fire (unbalanced, with PrimaLuna). Speaker: Kubala-Sosna Elation!. AC: Kubala-Sosna Elation!, manufacturers' own.

Accessories Target TT-5 equipment racks; Ayre Acoustics Myrtle Blocks; ASC Tube Traps, RPG Abffusor panels; Shunyata Research Dark Field cable elevators; Audio Power Industries 116 Mk.II & PE-1 AC line conditioners (hard drive, computers). AC power comes from two dedicated 20A circuits, each just 6' from breaker box.

—John Atkinson

The YGA speakers' stable, accurate imaging placed me back in Yoshi's, in Oakland, California.

played to the Carmel 2's many strengths—its clarity, transparency, well-defined stereo imaging, excellent dynamic range, clean top octaves, and low-frequency articulation—and not those that revealed its few weaknesses: a slightly colored upper midrange, a rather lean bass.

But once I'd found the amplifier—a tubed integrated!—that also played to its strengths, I very much enjoyed my time with the Carmel 2. This least-expensive speaker in the YG Acoustics line is still costly at \$24,300/pair, but it is extraordinarily well made, superbly finished, impressively engineered, and offers a quality of sound on a par with its price. The Carmel 2 will not be the speaker for all systems and rooms, but when properly set up in a sympathetic acoustic and matched with appropriate electronics, it will sing. ■



It's here. [The redefinition of your audio and video experience.](#)
The Emotiva XMC-1 combines precision 7.2 HD surround decoding, balanced audiophile multichannel preamplification, and full 4K video management with the power of Dirac Live™. Whether you're running the latest movies or high-definition audio, get ready for the most powerful, immersive experience you've ever had.

[The all-new XMC-1.](#) Stunning performance now. Modular and upgradable for the future. Covered by a 5-year warranty. Designed and made in the USA at our Tennessee production center.



Redefine your experience with the XMC-1. \$2499.

HERB REICHERT

GoldenEar Triton Five

LOUDSPEAKER

With each review I've written for *Stereophile*, I've redoubled my efforts to choose my adjectives prudently—to curb my penchant for overstatement. I've been feeling a need to speak more concisely and maturely about what my ears, mind, and heart experience while listening to music through a component that's new to me. So today, at the start of this review, I ask myself: What adjectives must I use to describe the character of GoldenEar Technology's new Triton Five tower loudspeaker (\$1999.98/pair)? Which words will best use our shared audiophile lexicon to give you a working vision of what I experienced?

As I type, I'm listening to a mad, hypnotic, avant-garde classical/Neolithic jazzphonic album—Moon-dog's *The Viking of Sixth Avenue* (2 LPs, Honest Jon's HJRLP18)—and trying to nail the gestalt of the sound of GoldenEar's Triton Five loudspeaker. The Five has a difficult-to-pinpoint GoldenEar Triton sound that affects every record I play in an extremely subtle but similar fashion, and I will consider myself a failure if I can't describe it to you. I mean, what do I need to say? "It has a velvety midband"? Or it has "silky highs" and "great low-level dynamic performance"? The Triton Five has all of those! I want to describe the sound as *relaxed*—but when I change amps, that description no longer fits; what I hear is instantly more "strained." I could pick another word—*soft*—but when I change records, that adjective becomes *harder* to justify. I could say *forgiving*—but maybe if I change DACs, *forgiving* would turn into *wrathful*. Do you sense my dilemma?

Description

There are three drivers in each 40lb GoldenEar Triton Five: two 6" cast-basket woofers, plus what



SPECIFICATIONS

Description Two-way, reflex-loaded, floorstanding loudspeaker. Drive-units: High Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR) tweeter, two 6" woofers, four 8" planar passive radiators. Frequency range: 26Hz–35kHz. Sensitivity: 90dB/2.83V/m. Nominal

impedance: "compatible with 8 ohms." Recommended amplification: 15–400Wpc.

Dimensions 44.25" (1135mm) H by 6.625" (170mm) W (front) by 8.125" (210mm) W (rear) by 12.375" (320mm) D. (Height includes base, no spikes.)

Weight: 40 lbs (18.2kg) net, 56 lbs (25.5kg) shipping. **Finish** Black cloth.

Serial numbers of units reviewed BLEA N1 0115 00300 & 00301.

Price \$1999.98/pair. Approximate number of dealers: 150.

Manufacturer

GoldenEar Technology, PO Box 141, Stevenson, MD 21153. Tel: (410) 998-9134. Fax: (410) 356-0808. Web: www.goldenear.com.

PASS

*Simply
Breathtaking*



Pass Laboratories, 13395 New Airport Rd. Suite G, Auburn, CA 95602

GoldenEar calls a High Velocity Folded Ribbon (HVFR) tweeter. Mounted on the speaker's sides are four 8" "Planar Sub-Bass Radiators," which are passive and reflex-load the woofers. The Triton Five is 44.25" high by 6.625" wide (front) by 8.125" wide (rear) by 12.375" deep, and is really a sealed box in a sock: A polyester sleeve is stretched to cover the entire speaker, except for the top and base—just like the old Vandersteen 2, DCM Time Window, and Quad ESL-63, all of which I thought looked *très moderne* in a wide range of domestic environments. The whole sock idea appeals to me: I think it makes all of those speakers look timeless (even a bit genderless?), while avoiding the dings and scratches inherent to wood-clad boxes. The Triton Five is a big tower speaker, but without the polished giant-robot look I find so immature and obtrusive. Obviously, GoldenEar doesn't feel the need to show off all their drivers and radiators to prove the speaker's worth.

The first time I peeled down a Triton's stocking, I spied that sexy-looking ribbon-esque tweeter . . . and the ghost of Dr. Oskar Heil. In the 1970s, Heil was the physicist behind a clever variation on the ribbon, planar, and electrostatic

Behind the sock: The Triton Five's upper section comprises a D'Appolito array.



The Triton Five is a big tower speaker, but without the polished giant-robot look I find so immature and obtrusive.

technologies that were flourishing at the time. Heil's innovative design employed a thin, ultralight, conductive membrane of polyethylene, folded like an accordion bellows and radiating sound from its entire surface area. The accordion-like folds were pure genius—they allowed Heil's Air Motion Transformer (AMT) to move a lot more air more quickly, and with less nonlinear motion, than could flat or domed tweeters.¹ Heil's clever design was the aesthetic and engineering cornerstone of the ElectroStatic Sound Company's (ESS) AMT1 speaker. I remember the AMT1 as sounding exceptionally smooth and easy-flowing.

I also remember the first tightly spaced, midrange-treble-midrange (MTM) driver-array designs developed by Joseph D'Appolito and published in *Speaker Builder* maga-

¹ The ratio between the total surface area of the AMT tweeter and that of its aperture is 5 to 1.

MEASUREMENTS

I used DRA Labs' MLSSA system and a calibrated DPA 4006 microphone to measure the GoldenEar Triton Five's frequency response in the farfield; and, for the nearfield responses, an Earthworks QTC-40, which has a 1/4" capsule.

The Triton Five's voltage sensitiv-

ity is specified as 90dB/2.83V/m, which is high; my estimate was slightly higher, at 90.8dB(B)/2.83V/m. This is a speaker that will play loudly on just the few watts provided by the tube amplifiers Herb Reichert prefers. The GoldenEar's impedance is specified as being "compatible with 8 ohms." Fig.1 shows my measurement of the Triton Five's impedance magnitude (solid trace) and electrical phase angle (dotted). The magnitude remains at or below 6 ohms for much of the midrange and from the mid-treble upward, with minimum values of 3.86 ohms at 195Hz and 3.5 ohms at 3.9kHz. With the speaker's high sensitivity, the impedance should not be a problem for low-powered amplifiers. However, as there is a combination of 5 ohms and a -51° electrical phase angle at 3.15kHz,

a frequency where music can have high energy, a tube amplifier will probably work best with the Triton Five when the speaker is driven from the amp's 4 ohm output-transformer tap.

As the Triton Five is covered with a black cloth "sock," which gives my accelerometer no firm surface to which to be attached, I rolled the sock down to examine how lively the enclosure was. There were a couple of high-Q resonances on the cabinet, these highest in level on the rear panel (fig.2). However, because these are high in frequency and will be damped by the sock, they shouldn't affect the GoldenEar's sound quality.

The red trace in fig.3 is the summed output of the four passive radiators on the Triton Five's sides; the blue trace is that of the woofers; all six units were

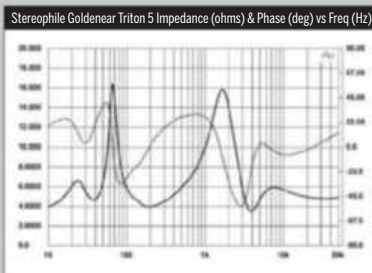


Fig.1 GoldenEar Triton Five, electrical impedance (solid) and phase (dashed) (2 ohms/vertical div.).

Streaming Power

Hi-Fi Choice concludes:

"The integrated amplifier is coming of age again, and in the H360 Hegel has created a new reference product in its range that looks to be creating a whole new benchmark performance for others to try their best to match"

HiFi Choice (UK) - Sept. 2015



HEGEL H360 - Integrated Amplifier with AirPlay & DLNA Streaming

Hegel H360 is a giant among integrated amplifiers. With 250 watts per channel into 8 ohms and a damping factor of more than 4000, it will control virtually any loudspeaker on the market. Thanks to the patented SoundEngine technology, this beast of an amplifier combines power, dynamics, finesse and musicality like no other integrated amp on the market. The connectivity is more of a bonus... There are balanced and unbalanced analog inputs. There is a Home Theatre bypass. There are optical and coaxial digital inputs, as well as a USB input for any signal up to DSD128... And, yes - it is also a streamer. Need we say more?



Hegel USA
East Longmeadow, MA
Phone: 413-224-2480
usa@hegel.com
www.hegel.com



zine. The Triton Five's upper section comprises just such a D'Appolito array, which, when used with a properly implemented third-order crossover, is intended to deliver a more coherent and vertically symmetrical wave launch centered directly on the tweeter's axis. I've listened to a lot of MTM speakers—even built one myself—but to my bewilderment, I usually experienced an incoherence that suggested irregularities in phase or dispersion.

Listening

The GoldenEar Triton Fives have been in and out of my system for months now. I've listened critically and uncritically, with and without the sock. (Actually, they look pretty smart and sound more lively and detailed when they're stripped nude.) But until now, I hadn't interrupted my listening to think about the Triton Five's dispersion, which always seemed okay. The tweeters are 36" above the floor; my ears are 35"–37" high when I sit in my main listening seat, and 44" when I'm at my desk, to the right of the right speaker. Moving my head from side to side and up and down while sitting at either place produced an unstressed evenness of response that I associated with an absence of obvious peaks or dips. But when I sat down to write this review, recollections of my earlier MTM experiences caused me not to believe my ears.

Curious, I hauled out my trusty copy of *Editor's Choice Sampler & Test CD* (Stereophile STPH016-2) and listened to "Dual-Mono Pink Noise." Now, when I moved my ears up and down about 14" from the front baffle, everything sounded surprisingly clear and even—except for a tiny dip just above the tweeter axis. At my main listening position, about 8' from the Triton Fives, which were toed in to fire directly at my ears, moving my head right, left, up, and

down revealed nothing unusual. It would seem that Sandy Gross—GoldenEar's founder, CEO, and resident golden ear—and chief engineer Bob Johnston have conquered what I believe to be the D'Appolito array's propensity toward unpredictable dispersion behavior.

WITH THE LINE MAGNETIC LM-518 IA: I first met Sandy Gross only about a year ago, and liked him right away. He's an aesthete: a connoisseur of world art, diverse music, fine wines, exotic beauty. These traits have given him the ability to connect the dots between the ancient and the modern as well as between the quotidian and the sublime. Gross's wide-ranging connoisseurship has allowed him to study high-level art and still get his hands dirty designing speak-

Sandy Gross is an aesthete: a connoisseur of world art, diverse music, fine wines, exotic beauty.

ers and starting one successful audio business after another. (GoldenEar Technology was preceded by Polk Audio and Definitive Technology.) When I grasped this, I guessed that it was Gross's discriminating taste and worldliness that had made the Triton Five exactly what it is; when he told me he'd used a Line Magnetic LM-219IA as his reference integrated amplifier while voicing the Five, I felt certain that guess was correct.

For the record: The LM-219IA is a more deluxe version of my own reference integrated, the LM-518IA (\$4450), which I reviewed in the October issue. During my listening, the single-ended, 845-tube LM-518IA had driven the Triton Fives with extraordinary precision, charm, and grace. The trump cards of this combination were more saturated

measurements, continued

measured in the nearfield and their outputs were scaled in the ratio of the square roots of the total radiating areas. The slight notch at 35Hz in the woofers' response suggests that the passive radiators are tuned to that frequency, though their output actually covers a wider bandpass than the norm for a reflex design. The black trace below 300Hz is the complex sum of the outputs of the woofers and radiators; as expected, it is down by 6dB at the radiator tuning frequency.

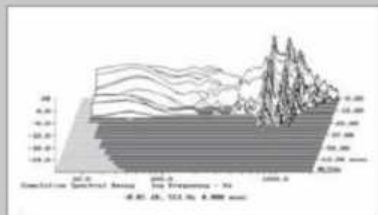


Fig.2 GoldenEar Triton Five, cumulative spectral-decay plot calculated from output of accelerometer fastened to center of rear panel behind tweeter (MLS driving voltage to speaker, 7.55V; measurement bandwidth, 2kHz).

The black trace above 300Hz in fig.3 shows the Triton Five's farfield frequency response on the tweeter axis, averaged across a 30° horizontal window. Though some small peaks and dips can be seen, the response is impressively flat from the lower midrange through to the beginning of the top octave. The broad peak between 1 and

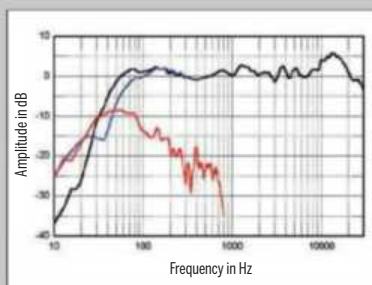


Fig.3 GoldenEar Triton Five, anechoic response on tweeter axis at 50°, averaged across 30° horizontal window and corrected for microphone response, with: nearfield responses of woofers (blue), passive radiators (red), and their complex sum (black), respectively plotted below 300Hz, 800Hz, and 300Hz.

2kHz might make the speaker sound a touch forward, but I note that HR actually found the speaker's overall balance neutral. The excess of energy in the top octave actually compensates for the folded-ribbon tweeter's lack of output off axis in this region, as can be seen in fig.4. Other than a slight flare at the bottom of the tweeter's passband—the corresponding slight lack of energy at the top of the woofers' passband might correlate with HR commenting that some singers sounded "ghostly, and

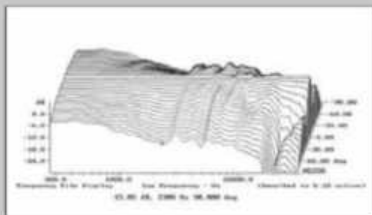


Fig.4 GoldenEar Triton Five, lateral response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 90–5° off axis, reference response, differences in response 5–90° off axis.

American Handcrafted Sound.

Rogers
HIGH FIDELITY

BE SURE TO VISIT US IN ROOM 29-124
IN THE VENETIAN HOTEL AT CES IN LAS VEGAS
FROM JANUARY 6TH THROUGH JANUARY 9TH

At the heart of every amplifier is the power supply.



Our heart is **STRONG.**

- 1800 Watt Linear Power Supply Design for 200 Watts peak output per channel
- Provides 100 times headroom above max power output
- Superb transient response and musical tone
- Custom wound
- All silver plated
- Teflon jacketed wire for reliability and low capacitive reactance to transients
- Massive 10 pounds
- Built to Mil-Spec standards

SEARCH **#ROGERSHIGHFIDELITY** FOR FULL STORY



OUR PRODUCTS ARE **GUARANTEED FOR LIFE**



BORN IN WARWICK, NY | 845-987-7744 | ROGERSHIGHFIDELITY.COM

instrumental and vocal colors. These speakers liked the fiery kiln of a tube amp behind them—even if it was only 22W.

This was the beguiling amp-speaker combo that spurred my rediscovery of Moondog (Louis Thomas Hardin, 1916–1999). Moondog's Neolithic rhythms, Arapaho Sun Dance beats, homemade drums, 25-string harps, swing-bop saxophones, seven-stringed zithers, homemade keyboards, metal cans, traffic sounds, chanting, and singing propelled me daily through this review process. (*Be a hobo and go with me / from Hoboken to the sea.*) Before he left New York, in 1973, Moondog performed regularly on the sidewalks of Sixth Avenue, near 53rd Street, close to Carnegie Hall. His compositions inspired John Cage and Charlie Parker. Charles Mingus touted him as an innovator; minimalist composers Philip Glass and Steve Reich recorded with him. He shared the stage with Ravi Shankar and William Burroughs. Arturo Toscanini championed him.

The Viking of Sixth Avenue defined my experience with the Triton Fives. They showed me everything, letting me sense Moondog's considerable height and unique energy. They showed me his spirit. His instruments seemed tangible and real—positioned right there on the concrete in front of me. The Triton Five was a perfect match with the Line Magnetic 845-based amps.

WITH THE VINNIE ROSSI LIO: Vinnie Rossi's 25Wpc LIO integrated (\$7750 as reviewed in *Stereophile's* September, 2015 issue²) is one of the most grainless, pure-sounding amplifiers I have heard. Driving the GoldenEar Triton Fives, it created a modestly priced system capable of elite audiophile sound. Crystalline images sat in real acoustic spaces. Vocal and instrumental timbres were exact and attention grabbing. I got lost in Yehudi Menuhin's recording, as violin soloist and conductor of the Robert Masters Chamber Orchestra,

of J.S. Bach's Violin Concertos 1 and 2 and the Double Concerto (with Christian Ferras) (LP, Seraphim S-60258). This recording sounded so natural and beautiful it drew me in uncontrollably, like a riptide of Protestant ethos. A very recommendable combination.

WITH THE PARASOUND HALO INTEGRATED: Easygoing low distortion meets easygoing low distortion. Strangely, with the Parasound Halo Integrated (160Wpc into 8 ohms, reviewed in November), the GoldenEar Triton Fives went all shy and soft and excessively mannered. I like more kicking, biting, and dish-throwing in my music, but this combo's personality was more "Yes, dear; whatever you say, dear . . ."

This same Halo Integrated had driven the Magnepan .7 speakers with more swing and sway than any amp I could find other than the Pass Labs XA100.5s; in contrast, with the Triton Fives, the Halo Integrated played competently and enjoyably, but didn't open my chest or stimulate my heart, as had the Line Magnetic or Vinnie Rossi amps.

"Sweet kisses I missed"

If I told you that the GoldenEar Triton Fives sounded so balanced and natural that they effectively reproduced existential rock ennui, would you think I was spouting crazy talk or would you give me a chance to explain? Well then, let me plead the case for you to find and listen to Buddy Holly's noirish cover of Bo Diddley's "Love Is Strange" (7" 45rpm, Coral 62558).

With the Triton Fives powered by Simaudio's Moon Neo 340i integrated (\$5400; review *still* in process), this iconic song escaped its 1950s suburban normality and slipped into a surprisingly 21st-century poetic netherworld. The

² See www.stereophile.com/content/vinnie-rossi-lio-modular-integrated-amplifier.

measurements, continued

(strangely) more generalized" than the DeVore O/93—this graph reveals that, below the top octave, the Triton Five has wide, even dispersion.

In the vertical plane (fig.5), the GoldenEar's output suffers from a broad suckout in the crossover region more than 10° above the tweeter axis, which is 36° above the floor. (A survey performed in the 1990s by *Stereophile* contributor Thomas J. Norton found that 36° is the height of the ears of the average listener sitting in an average

chair—not a so-called director's chair, whose seats tend to be significantly higher.)

Turning to the time domain, the Triton Five's step response on the tweeter axis (fig.6) suggests that the tweeter is connected in inverted polarity, the woofers in positive polarity. However, as the decay of the tweeter's step doesn't quite blend with the start of the woofers' step, this driver's acoustic center appears to be a little too forward

compared with that of the woofers.

Still, fig.3 indicates that the frequency response in the crossover region is well managed. Finally, although the GoldenEar's cumulative spectral-decay plot (fig.7) reveals the presence of some low-level delayed energy in the low and mid-treble, this graph demonstrates an impressively clean initial decay overall.

GoldenEar's Triton Five Tower appears to be another well-engineered loudspeaker from Messrs. Gross and Johnston, offering excellent measured performance at an affordable price.

—John Atkinson

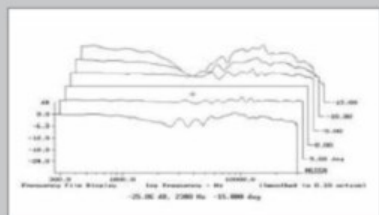


Fig.5 GoldenEar Triton Five, vertical response family at 50°, normalized to response on tweeter axis, from back to front: differences in response 15–5° above axis, reference response, differences in response 5–10° below axis.

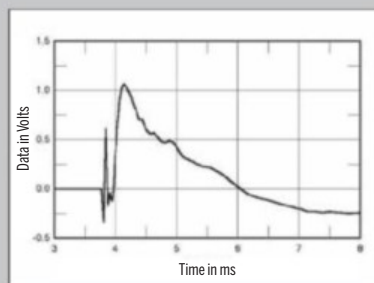


Fig.6 GoldenEar Triton Five, step response on tweeter axis at 50° (5ms time window, 30kHz bandwidth).

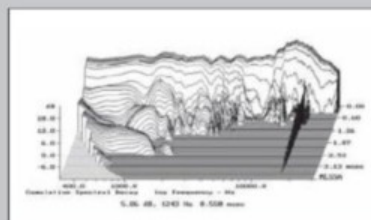


Fig.7 GoldenEar Triton Five, cumulative spectral-decay plot on tweeter axis at 50° (0.15ms risetime).

ECLIPSE

Introducing the ultimate version
of Aesthetix Saturn Series



Aesthetix stands the test of time.

Core principles define our designs,
craftsmen hand assemble our products and
honest music is our ambition.

~

Featured in The Absolute Sound's
Illustrated History of High-End Audio, Volume Two: Electronics

Saturn ECLIPSE Edition

Atlas, Calypso, Janus, Rhea, Romulus and Pandora

- "StealthCaps" customized for Aesthetix ECLIPSE
- Advanced chassis damping
- New and improved power supplies
- Enhanced transformer isolation
- Factory upgradable



www.aesthetix.net

MUSICAL SURROUNDINGS  US DISTRIBUTION
510.547.5006

Simaudio added at least 30% to the size of the soundstage, solidified image boundaries, and added presence and mature authority to the teen idol and his band. The Triton Fives plus Neo 340i turned sock-hop Holly into Lou Reed. I had never before experienced a 7" 45rpm single produce so much transparent air and space. The Triton Five–Neo 340i pairing burned the melody and bleak mood of “Love Is Strange” into my head. More than any of the other combinations, this one reproduced musical instruments and voices at their own natural sizes.

The Triton Fives seemed to like the Neo’s 125W, so I played the lyrical, bass-driven *Cou\$ins Presents . . . A Tribute 2 Studio One & Treasure Isle Records* (LP, Cou\$ins COU-DLP037). What ensued was pure, ganja-fueled early Rastafarianism. The bass bounced and flowed as it framed these rocksteady ballads in a just-right manner. I have always argued that listening to music in the home should make me dance and transport me to faraway places—and that is what the Triton Fives did. Their pacing and forward momentum made my hips sway. I dreamed of giant spliffs, overproof rum, grinding voodoo sorceresses. The Moon Neo 340i produced from the Triton Fives more physical presence and fleshy rhythm than any of the other amps, and pushed more microdetail out of those HVFR tweeters—which, I suspect, is what made the bass attacks, tone decays, and sweaty mid-range textures more pronounced.

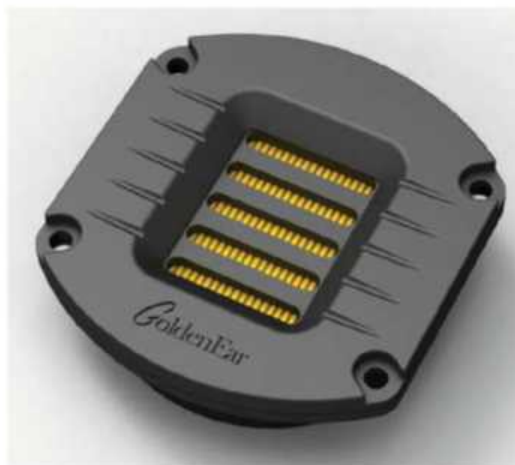
This combination parlayed a very clean, hyperdetailed, audiophile sound into a surprisingly satisfying tropical-night experience. My only criticism of the sound of the GoldenEar Triton Fives as handled by the Moon Neo 340i was that it was maybe a little bit *too* refined for these slinky Studio One dancehall melodies.

In comparison to . . .

When I review audio gear, I’ve found that it’s always wise to finish by returning to where I started.

I put the GoldenEars and Simaudio aside, and returned to my reference Line Magnetic LM-518IA and trusty DeVore Fidelity Orangutan O/93s (\$8400/pair, reviewed by Sam Tellig in March 2013). Playing the Cou\$ins Records compilation, I felt I was listening via Studio One’s paper-coned monitor speakers. I was immediately struck by how much raw *Jamaicanness* appeared in my room. Wooden drumsticks slapping snare rims sounded distinctly more real and tangible. Electric-bass harmonics were more fully developed and corporeal. Offbeat rhythms and staccato chords volleyed for my attention. Percussion harmonics became suddenly *visible*.

That switch to the four-times-as-expensive DeVores put the Triton Fives in broader perspective. The Orangutan O/93s delivered a martial prowess and an extra-drunk dancing quality that the GoldenEars didn’t. With the DeVores, there was more flesh and blood. I played *King Arthur*, by Henry Purcell, that prodigy of London’s Old Pye Street and Devil’s Acre, as recorded in 1979 by Alfred Deller and the Deller Consort (LP Harmonia Mundi HMC E200). This



GoldenEar’s High-Velocity Folded Ribbon tweeter is a variant on the Heil AMT.

The GoldenEar Triton Fives played enjoyably but very differently with every amp I tried, and that is good.

work, based on the poem by John Dryden, is neither opera nor play but one of those charming hybrids (semi-operas?) that Purcell and Deller seemed to specialize in, and features kicking horses and ritual sacrifices by the Saxon army. The Purcell was 100% enjoyable via both pairs of speakers, but the DeVores brought something extra—something more corporeal—to the

presentation. The GoldenEars generated a big, open, fully constituted London-theatre space, filled with nicely articulated musicians and singers. But compared to the DeVores, the Triton Fives made Deller and his performers seem ghostly, and (strangely) more generalized.

Unless there’s a dip at 1–2kHz in the Triton Five’s frequency response, what I was hearing was probably not something John Atkinson can measure. The Triton Five’s tonal character was conspicuously well balanced and authentic, entirely smooth and easy flowing, and the bass was admirably detailed and extended. Inarguably, the GoldenEar Triton Fives imaged better than the DeVore Orangutans, but they lacked a measure of the O/93s’ punch, texture, and raw *drive*. Compared to the DeVores, the Tritons sounded a bit dark. The GoldenEars did audiophile-checklist stuff with unquestionable aplomb; the DeVores did dirt, dreads, colored lights on wires, and Red Stripe Jamaican Lager with greater realism. But again, the DeVores cost more than four times as much as the GoldenEars.

Conclusions

Have I elucidated the sound quality of GoldenEar Technology’s Triton Five? Not really? Well . . . for those of you who didn’t read between the lines, let me make one point above all others: No amplifier or loudspeaker makes music all by itself. There’s no such thing as a universally good-sounding amp or speaker. There are only marriages of amps and speakers of widely varying compatibilities. The GoldenEar Triton Fives played enjoyably but very differently with every amp I tried, and that is good. At their best, they were musically transcendent—they loved Bach, Bruckner, Thelonious Monk, and Moondog. At their worst, they sounded beautiful but kind of soft and accommodating. When someone says such-and-such speaker sounded too dull or too bright or too analytical, ask: “What amp was driving them?” If the speaker was well engineered, as the Triton Five appears to be, it was probably the *combination* of amp and speaker they were describing. But sometimes, the cause is simply the tweeter.

Ever since 1982, when Celestion introduced the SL-6 loudspeaker with its copper-dome tweeter, metal-dome tweeters have dazzled audiophiles with their faux clarity and



Contour S 1.4 LE

The legend continues.

Dynaudio Contour – a magic name among audiophiles. And the living example of a true high-end loudspeaker. Consistently refined and further optimized since its launch in 1986 to this very day. Completely handmade in Denmark, the new Contour S 1.4 and S 3.4 Limited Edition models offer absolute refinement in design and finish, combined with a higher level of sound quality that is instantly audible. The legend continues. www.dynaudio.com/contour



All there is. **DYNAUDIO**

high-definition effects. But when (ca 2005?) the patents ran out on Dr. Heil's Air Motion Transformer, a whole slew of inspired speaker-makers were quickly up and running with their own variations, more than happy to adopt the AMT's smoother, more softly detailed elegance. Sandy Gross has made the AMT technology the *axis mundi* of his GoldenEar line. In fact, GoldenEar's HVFR tweeter may be the most important ingredient in the Triton Five's overall sound character. It may be what makes the Five sound so velvety and delectable—and it's surely what makes the Five throw such enormous soundstages. I feel the GoldenEar's HVFR is everything feminine and sexy that, say, some beryllium tweeters are not.

And I suspect that the HVFR's precisely dimensioned shape and wide dispersion in the horizontal axis is part of the reason the Triton Five's D'Appolito driver array works so well. I'm 90% certain that the "GoldenEar Triton sound" I mentioned at the beginning is a result of the skillful implementation of the AMT technology by GoldenEar's chief engineer, Bob Johnston. But likewise, the most consistent sound character I heard from the Triton Five was a modicum of contrast reduction and a slight lack of punch and sparkle, which could also be tweeter related.

In the end, I believe the biggest differences among combinations of amps and speakers always come down to which pairings drag the most feeling, beauty, and artistry from a recording. Some pairings *sound* really good but play music indifferently—while other amp-speaker combos will tear your heart out, make you cry, and give you goose bumps. The GoldenEar Technology Triton Five is a modestly priced audiophile speaker that can either be extremely compelling

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Analog Sources Acoustic Signature Wow XL turntable, TA-1000 tonearm, Ortofon 2M Black cartridge; VPI Scout Jr. turntable & tonearm, Ortofon 2M Red cartridge; Technics SL1200MK2 turntable, SME M2-9 tonearm, Soundsmith Carmen cartridge.

Digital Sources Burson Audio Virtuoso Conductor DAC-headphone amplifier, Line Magnetic LM-502 CA DAC.

Preamplification Blue Horizon Ideas Profono, Schiit Audio Mani, Soundsmith MMP3 phono stages.

Integrated Amplifiers Line Magnetic LM-518 IA, Parason Halo Integrated, Simaudio Moon Neo 340i, Vinnie Rossi LIO.

Loudspeakers DeVore Fidelity Orangutan O/93, Falcon Acoustics LS3/5a, Magnepan .7.

Cables Interconnect: AudioQuest Cinnamon, Big Sur, Golden Gate; Auditorium 23; Kimber Kable Silver Streak. Speaker: AudioQuest Type 4, Auditorium 23, Kimber Kable 8TC.

Accessories Sound Anchor stands, Dr. Feickert Analogue Protractor & Adjust+ cartridge-setup tools. —Herb Reichert

or slightly indifferent, depending on the choice of amplifier or music. Most important, at \$1998.98, a pair of Triton Fives could be worth several times that price—especially if you take care to audition them with a range of amplifiers. Recommended, particularly for lovers of jazz, classical, and avant-garde music. ■

Harbeth

LOUDSPEAKERS

Harbeth's SuperHL5plus monitor loudspeaker has been awarded a coveted Golden Ear Award 2015.



“... so easy, beautiful, and effortlessly natural is the reproduction.”

Paul Seydor – The Absoute Sound



This new-generation Harbeth is my tribute to the BBC engineers who dreamed of audio perfection. They lacked the technology to make it happen; we've just achieved it.

Alan A Shaw, designer



Contact: fidelisav.com 603-880-4434

The multi award-winning Super HL5plus opens a window into your music.



Astell&Kern

ULTIMATE HIGH FIDELITY SOUND SYSTEM



AK380 AMP



AK380 Cradle



AK CD-RIPPER

THE EVOLUTION OF
A MASTERPIECE

AK380

Accessories (Amp/Cradle/CD-Ripper)



- 32bit/384kHz Bit to Bit Playback
- Native DSD Playback
- 20Bands EQ/0.1dB Adjustment
- VCXO Reference Clock (200 Femto Seconds)
- Extendable Dock Connector
- AK Connect App Compatible
- Metal Touch Sensor Home Button
- 256GB internal memory
- DLNA 1.0 with Wi-Fi

ART DUDLEY

Jadis Orchestra Reference Mk.II

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



I don't think Americans dislike the French a tenth as much as the corporate media, in their endless struggle to sell our pettiest ideas back to us in cartoon form, suggests we do. Our nations' histories are intertwined, to our great mutual benefit. Americans envy the French their centuries of cultural accomplishments, the French envy Americans their sense of industry and their wide-open spaces. (That one's a tie.) We turn to them for wine, they turn to us for blue jeans. (A point for France.) We watch their films about law-breaking hipsters, they watch our films about law-breaking gangsters. (A point for the US, in whose films things actually happen.)

And we appear to love each other's audio gear. French audiophiles have welcomed into their homes a good many Wilson Audio loudspeakers, VPI turntables, and Ayre Acoustics amplifiers, while we have imported our share of Focal and

**Americans
envy the French
their centuries
of cultural
accomplishments.**

Triangle speakers and Jadis amps—the last being of special interest to me, given their reliance on the Holy Binity of tubes and transformers.

So it was in the fall of 2013 that I leaped at an opportunity to write about the then-new Jadis I-35, a 30Wpc integrated amplifier (\$7995)¹ that sounded

sunny and graceful in my system, which favors amps of modest power. Two years later, I was offered the chance to write about a different Jadis integrated: the considerably less expensive Orchestra Reference Mk.II (\$4795). As our brothers in culture and commerce would say, *Pourquoi diable ne pas?*

Description

The Orchestra Reference Mk.II is the latest version of an

1 My review of the Jadis I-35 was published in the January 2014 issue: www.stereophile.com/content/jadis-i-35-integrated-amplifier.

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Two-channel tubed, class-AB integrated amplifier. Tube complement: four EL34, two ECC83. Inputs: 5 single-ended (RCA). Outputs: 1 single-ended (RCA), two pairs of binding posts. Rated output power at 1kHz: 40Wpc (16dBW). In-

put impedance: >100k ohms. Input sensitivity for nominal output power: 250mV RMS. Frequency response: 5Hz–60kHz, –3dB.

Dimensions 20.7" (530mm) W by 7.8" (200mm) H by 10.5" (270mm) D. Weight: 44 lbs (20kg).

Serial number of unit reviewed 3819.

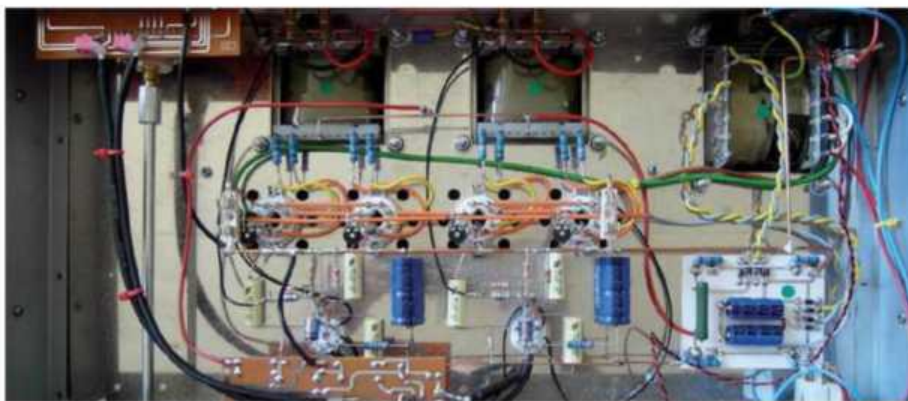
Price \$4795; remote control, add \$350. Approximate number of dealers: 8. Warranty: 2 years (90 days on tubes).

Manufacturer Jadis S.A.R.L., Chemin du Pech, 11800

Villedubert, France. Tel: (33) 04-68-78-87-93. Web: www.jadis-electronics.com. US distributor: Bluebird Music Ltd., 271 Woodward Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14217. Tel: (416) 638-8207. Web: www.bluebirdmusic.com.

integrated amp that has been a Jadis mainstay since the late 1990s. It uses a total of six tubes: two contemporary, Russian-made Tung-Sol 12AX7 small-signal dual triodes, and four similarly Russian Electro-Harmonix EL34 pentodes. When I first took note of its scant number of small-signal tubes, I simply assumed that the Orchestra Reference Mk.II is among those contemporary integrated amps built around a passive rather than an active preamp stage. My assumption was indeed simple: As it turns out, *this* Jadis is a hybrid, with a pair of bipolar transistors to supply gain ahead of the amp's tubed driver stage,² which employs one 12AX7 per channel in what Jadis describes as a cathode-driver circuit.

Jadis claims that each channel's push-pull pair of EL34 tubes produces 40W in class-AB, with a small amount of global feedback, and with the tubes working in fixed-bias



Inside the Orchestra Reference. Impeccable wiring and soldering, but exposed busbars mandate owners not rebias tubes themselves

The Orchestra Reference Mk.II's output transformers are designed and wound in-house.

2 Readers interested in the psychology of audio reviewing—I do not sneer as I write this—should note that I didn't learn of the Orchestra Reference Mk.II's active, solid-state front end until well after making all of my listening notes. Needless to say, I altered none of my subjective observations to fit that newfound fact, but I did remove one comment that said, in effect, "I was surprised to hear such a good sense of drive from an integrated amp with a passive front end," because that observation now seemed pretty stupid.

MEASUREMENTS

I measured the Jadis Orchestra Reference Mk.II using my Audio Precision SYS2722 system (see the January 2008 "As We See It" at www.stereophile.com/content/measurements-maps-precision). I had a problem inserting the EL34 output-stage tubes: the positioning lug on the tube's bottom didn't make a sufficiently positive engagement with the matching cutout in the ceramic tube base. I broke one EL34 when I thought I had it correctly inserted but found out it wasn't—when I removed the tube to reinsert it correctly, its plastic base broke off. Before beginning the testing, I carefully reinserted the broken tube in the

correct orientation—the Orchestra's heater circuit is active for the output tubes only when all four tubes are installed and making contact. However, the right channel didn't produce an output—later, I discovered that an internal fuse was blown—so I continued the testing on the left channel.

But when I began to examine the Orchestra's linearity, I ran into another problem. The THD+noise at 500mW into 8 ohms was very high, at almost 1% of pure second harmonic, which seems much too high for a design using EL34 tubes.

Concerned that our sample of the Orchestra Reference Mk.II had been

damaged in shipping from Art's place to mine, I informed Bluebird Music, Jadis's North American distributor, of this; they sent me a new set of tubes, in case the high distortion was due to a faulty tube. With its tubes and fuse replaced, the Orchestra's THD+N at 500mW into 8 ohms dropped to a more reasonable 0.29%. However, when I plotted how the THD+N varied with power with the new tubes, the distortion rose rapidly, reaching 1% at 2.8W into 8 ohms and 3% at 19.8W into 8 ohms.

I contacted Bluebird again, who reminded me that, as the Jadis Orchestra is a fixed-bias design, I needed to reset

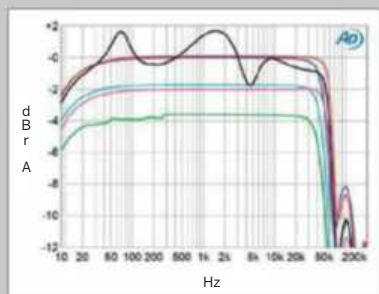


Fig.1 Jadis Orchestra Reference, volume control set to maximum, frequency response at 2.83V into: simulated loudspeaker load (gray), 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (magenta), 2 ohms (red) (2dB/vertical div.).



Fig.2 Jadis Orchestra Reference, small-signal, 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

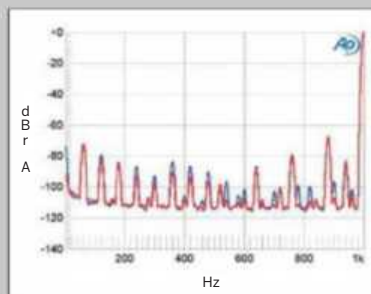


Fig.3 Jadis Orchestra Reference, spectrum of 1kHz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 1W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

MAGICO'S WINNING STREAK CONTINUES!

INTRODUCING THE **MAGICO S7.**

[CLEAR, DIMENSIONAL, DYNAMIC, INVOLVING]

When you hear the new Magico S7, we're confident you'll agree with us that it's a "winner"! The S7 comes from the very same design team that created the extraordinary Q7MkII and M Project loudspeakers.

"We wanted Magico to create a speaker that captured the "essence" of the Q7 MkII and M Project designs in a smaller and more affordable design. Now, after our in-depth evaluation, we're confident in saying that not only is the S7 the finest speaker available in its price range, it also significantly outperforms many speakers costing much more!"

Terry Menacker,
Founder, Overture

Technically the S7 is a tour-de-force. Key design elements include new advanced bass drivers (3), mid-range, and tweeter designs, Magico's exclusive Elliptical Symmetry Crossover, and a totally inert resonance free enclosure.

The results are a true "full-range" speaker that creates an "immersive" soundstage with extraordinary bass extension, dynamics, pinpoint imaging and focus. Mid-range resolution is remarkable. High frequencies are smooth and extended with excellent dispersion. The S7 is remarkably open and relaxed when properly driven.

From the most complex musical passage to the most detailed and intricate, the S7 is capable of letting you hear everything the recording engineer captured. And wait until you hear the S7's in a Magico multi-channel system playing your favorite movie soundtrack. Hold on! The S7 does it all!

We invite you to visit us and hear the Magico S7 at its best at Overture. Please call 800.838.1812 for more information or to schedule an audition of the Magico S7.

OVERTURE
ULTIMATE AUDIO/VIDEO

2423 Concord Pike (Rt 202) • Wilmington, Delaware • 302.478.6050 • 800.838.1812
www.overtureav.com • No Sales Tax in Delaware

*"The most significant audio product
I have ever hooked up to my system.
It was flawless."*



VAC Signature SE Preamplifier w/optional phono stage

Levels of detail resolution, ambience retrieval, air, and low-level dynamic articulation across the audioband that were nearly indistinguishable from a live performance.

The Signature SE produced an illusion of live musicians playing in an actual space better than any preamp I'd heard.

I'm not used to hearing this type of realistic reproduction from an audio component. I'm used to hearing it from a violinist sitting 10' away.

...with the Signature SE, I was struck by how the dynamic attack, the timbral envelope, and the decays of the notes sounded more like a real grand piano than I'd ever heard with this recording.

The day I removed the Signature SE from my system, to send it on to John Atkinson to be measured, my wife came home from work, looked at the rearranged components on my rack, and said, "What? The preamp's gone?"

Robert J. Reina, Stereophile June 2015



Valve Amplification Company

www.vac-amps.com telephone 941-952-9695

We build the world's finest audio instruments

mode, their cathodes at ground. The bias current is not user adjustable; each tube has its own miniature trim pot for that purpose, but those pots can be accessed only by removing the bottom plate: a chore and a half. As shipped from Jadis, the Orchestra's individually boxed output tubes are marked for their specific sockets, sparing the need to recalibrate the amp when it is first installed in one's system.

As in all Jadis amplifiers, the Orchestra Reference Mk.II's output transformers are designed and wound in-house, then encased in resin before being wrapped in paper and something very like shellac. These transformers are wound for Ultralinear configuration: with a tapped primary for connection to the EL34s' screen grids. (A brief look inside the amp confirmed that the plate and screen grid of each output tube are connected to separate



Earlier power-supply caps, in French Blue!

The sound of the Jadis was more than a mere tone feast.

terminals on the primary of that channel's output transformer.) That said, Jadis describes this amplifier's output

section as combining the electrical characteristics of both Ultralinear and triode configurations. Strictly speaking, the latter requires the screen grid of an output pentode to be connected directly to its plate, so I assume that Jadis means that the primaries of their output transformers have their taps nearer than usual to the plate end of that coil. But that's only a guess—Jadis guards the specifics of this design as proprietary.

The amplifier is built into a stainless-steel chassis of slightly unusual size: At 20.7" wide by 7.8" high by 10.5"

measurements, continued

the bias for the four output tubes. They sent me the relevant pages from the service manual to show me how.

I turned the amplifier upside down, carefully balanced it on its tube cage and transformers, and removed the bottom panel. The bias is set by measuring the DC voltage across each tube's plate resistor and adjusting a small trim pot until the voltage measures 200mV. With the new tubes, the voltages across the plate resistors before adjustment were 138 and 31mV (left), and 158 and 134mV (right). After adjustment, the best I could achieve were 198, 199, 205, and 202mV, respectively—all very close to the correct value, and better matched between each pair. A spot check of distortion indicated that the Orchestra's linearity was also much improved, so I replaced

the bottom cover, turned the amplifier right-side up, and resumed testing.

The Orchestra Reference Mk.II preserved absolute polarity (*ie*, was non-inverting). Its sensitivity is specified as 250mV for full output, equivalent to 37.1dB. My measurement of the maximum gain at 1kHz into 8 ohms was somewhat lower, at 33.3dB. While the amplifier's input impedance is specified at >100k ohms, my measurement was lower, at 29k ohms at 20Hz and 1kHz, dropping slightly to 27k ohms at 20kHz. These impedances are still usefully higher than the norm, however, and won't load down source components.

The output impedance was very high, at 3 ohms across the audioband, which means that with our standard simulated loudspeaker (see [www](http://www.stereophile.com/content/real-life-measurements-page-2).

www.stereophile.com/content/real-life-measurements-page-2), the variations in response due to the interaction between the output impedance and that of the speaker reach an audible ± 1.8 dB (fig.1, gray trace). The audio-band response into purely resistive loads is extremely flat, however, though it gently rolls off in the low bass. Note the sharp rolloff above 40kHz, reaching -3dB at 50kHz into 8 ohms (fig.1, blue and red traces). Note also the presence of a small resonant peak at 100kHz, which results in a single damped cycle of ringing with a 10kHz squarewave (fig.2). Commendably, the responses in fig.1, taken with the volume control set to its maximum, didn't change at lower settings.

Channel separation at 1kHz was good in the L-R direction, at 76dB, but less so

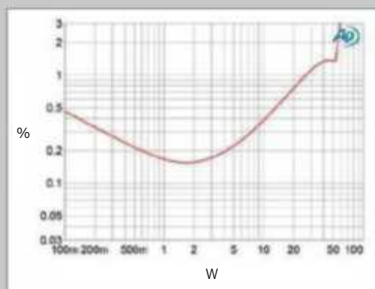


Fig.4 Jadis Orchestra Reference, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms.

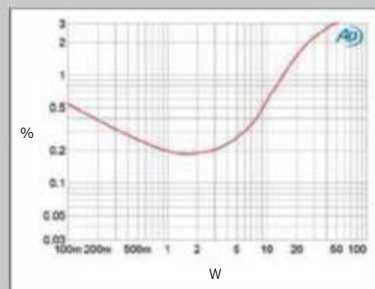


Fig.5 Jadis Orchestra Reference, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 4 ohms.

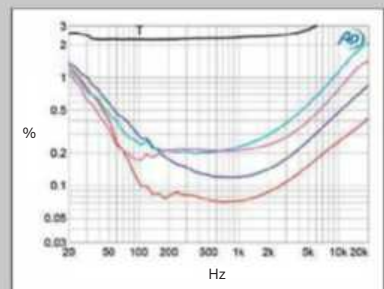


Fig.6 Jadis Orchestra Reference, THD+N (%) vs frequency at 4V into: 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red), 4 ohms (left cyan, right magenta), 2 ohms (gray).



BLADE & BLADE TWO



UNCOMPROMISED INNOVATION

Just as KEF's philosophy has always been to innovate in pursuit of the most accurate and realistic sound, the Blade Series speakers are about perfecting a groundbreaking concept to delight people who really love music.

Whatever your taste, Blade and Blade TWO are what all great design aspires to: being the best they can possibly be.

For a complete list of Blade Dealers, please visit **our website**.



deep, the Orchestra Reference has the proportions of a stretch limo, occupying considerable width but little enough depth that something else—a small phono preamp, perhaps?—could sit in front of it on the same shelf. Its outer surfaces are polished to a chrome-like finish, and a nice-looking, black-enameled tube cage, 10" wide by 5" high by 5" deep, protects the zookeeper from the animals and vice versa. The Orchestra Reference adheres to Jadis's usual style of setting against a silver-colored background a gold-colored faceplate and matching knobs for volume, source selection, and—hal-lelujah!—channel balance. As an option, remote control is offered (\$350), but I asked Jadis not to send me a handset, because I prefer thrift over extravagance, and because I have



The Orchestra Reference, sans tube cage.

The amp's sound was richly colorful and beautifully balanced.

measurements, continued

R-L: 60dB. The wideband, unweighted signal/noise ratio, ref. 2.83V into 8 ohms and taken with the input shorted but the volume control set to its maximum, was an okay 70.75dB (average of both channels), increasing to 86.1dB when A-weighted. Spectral analysis of the amplifier's noise floor indicated that the primary sources of noise are spurious at the AC mains frequency of 60Hz and its harmonics (fig.3).

Fig.4 plots how the percentage of THD+N changes with output power into 8 ohms. The THD begins to rise above the noise around 2W, and though not very low, it's typical for a design using a single pair of EL34s. The distortion gently rises above that power, suggesting that the Orchestra uses only a modest amount of negative feedback, and reaches 1% (our

normal definition of clipping) at 26Wpc (14.15dBW). The Orchestra reached its specified maximum power of 40Wpc (16dBW) at 1.35% THD+N, and at 3% THD+N it delivered 59W (17.7dBW). Although Jadis says the Orchestra is optimized for a 4 ohm load, repeating this test into 4 ohms (fig.5) indicated a slightly higher level of distortion at low powers into this load, and the amplifier reached 1% THD+N at 15.5Wpc into 4 ohms (8.9dBW), and 40Wpc at 2.6% THD+N.

This dislike of low impedances can also be seen in fig.6, which plots the THD+N percentage against frequency at a modest output level into 8, 4, and 2 ohms. You can see that the right channel (red and magenta traces) is better behaved than the left (blue, cyan)—was this due to the slightly

higher bias voltages?—and that the Jadis really doesn't like 2 ohms (gray).

The distortion waveform appears to be a mix of the second and third harmonics (fig.7), this confirmed by spectral analysis (fig.8). Fortunately, intermodulation distortion was relatively low, especially at modest powers into 8 ohms (fig.9).

Once I had the new tubes installed and their biases optimized, the Jadis Orchestra performed relatively well on the test bench, given its circuit topology. But I do question the wisdom of choosing fixed bias for the output tubes, given how fussy the amplifier seems to be about the bias setting and the fact that, if the owner needs to replace a tube, it means a trip to the dealer to have a service technician readjust the bias.—John Atkinson

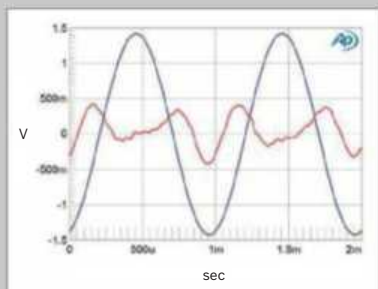


Fig.7 Jadis Orchestra Reference, 1kHz waveform at 2W into 8 ohms, 0.115% THD+N (blue); distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (red, not to scale).

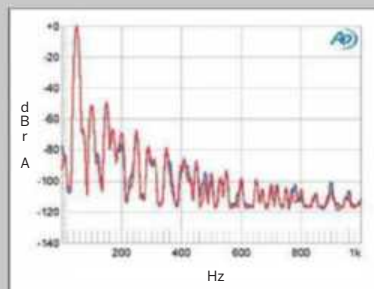


Fig.8 Jadis Orchestra Reference, spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC-1kHz, at 2W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

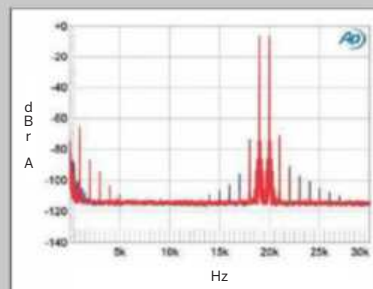


Fig.9 Jadis Orchestra Reference, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-24kHz, 19+20kHz at 2W peak into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

The Best Computer Audio Gear and a Generous
60-DAY SATISFACTION GUARANTEE

musicdirect

800-449-8333 | MUSICDIRECT.COM



SONY HAP-Z1ES
 High-Res Digital Audio Player
 \$1,999



MUSICAL FIDELITY MX DAC
 \$800



PS AUDIO PerfectWave DirectStream
 DSD DAC \$5,995



BENCHMARK DAC2 HGC
 DSD DAC \$1,995



REGA DAC-R
 \$1,195



MARANTZ HD-DAC1
 DAC/Headphone Amplifier \$799



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DacMagic Plus
 DAC/Preamplifier \$499



◀ **2015 CATALOG**

Get a FREE copy of our
 new 234-page catalog

Call or visit our website

about as much use for a remote as I do for a six-motor La-Z-Boy massage recliner with heat.

My sample of the Orchestra Reference Mk.II was as beautifully built as the somewhat more expensive Jadis I-35 I reviewed in the January 2014 issue. Apart from three small circuit boards—one for a portion of the power supply, one to which the input jacks and input selector are fastened, and one that contains the solid-state gain stage and the signal traces for the volume and balance controls—the amp is hand-wired, point-to point. The layout is sensible, the wiring and soldering are impeccably done, and the parts quality ranges from very good to superb.

Installation and setup

Shipping and packing materials for the Orchestra Reference Mk.II were of decent quality—it arrived in apparently flawless shape. The instruction manual includes a guide to installing the six tubes: For shipping, they're removed from their sockets and packed inside the tube cage, which must itself be removed from the case using a supplied Allen wrench. Each Orchestra Reference also comes with a signed *fiche de controle finale* (ie, final quality-control card); mine was signed by J.C. Calmettes, chief designer and son of Jadis's founder, André Calmettes. An AC cord is supplied; I didn't experiment with aftermarket replacements.

On the Orchestra Reference's rear panel are five pairs of single-ended (RCA) line-level inputs, plus a sixth pair of RCA jacks carrying the preamp-out signal. Only one pair of five-way speaker connectors is provided; as on the Jadis I-35 integrated amplifier I reviewed, these connectors are not labeled Left and Right, nor is this information provided in the otherwise fine manual. As it turned out, the left-channel connectors are on the left side of the panel when the amp is viewed from the front.

One evening, I armed myself with a few good recordings—including Robert Silverman's CD of Rachmaninoff's Piano Sonatas 1 and 2 (Stereophile STPH019-2), and Sir Adrian Boult and the New Philharmonia's spectacular performance of Vaughan Williams's Symphony 4 (LP, EMI ASD 2375)—and sat down to determine whether or not the Orchestra Reference inverted signal polarity. Repeatedly, I listened for a short time, then got up from my chair and swapped red for black on

A nice-looking tube cage protects the zookeeper from the animals and vice versa.

both channels, then sat back down and listened some more—yet every time I got up to make the change, those bastard musicians would immediately play louder or softer than they had while I was seated. After nearly an hour of this nonsense, I formed the impression that God was mocking me for wasting my time, and I abandoned the chore. I'd gotten the impression that the Orchestra Reference does *not* invert absolute polarity, but I don't really know. Ask John Atkinson.

Listening

My first impression, gathered while driving the Orchestra Reference's auxiliary inputs with Shindo Laboratory's Auriges Equalizer Amplifier (ie, phono preamp) and using the Jadis to drive my very sensitive Altec Valencia speakers, was that this humblest Jadis integrated sounded a *lot* like the Jadis I-35. The sounds of both amps were

characterized by a full but reasonably explicit bottom, a richly colorful midrange, and a sense of grand spatial scale. More important, both displayed reasonably good musical drive and excellent musical timing: When I used the less-expensive Jadis to play the title song of Procol Harum's *Broken Baricades* (LP, Chrysalis ILPS 9158), I was impressed by how well it portrayed Gary Brooker's nuanced phrasing as he sang "the presses are empty / the editors, torn," and by the manner in which the Jadis put across the always-scintillating drumming of the late B.J. Wilson. And on a fine new reissue of the LaSalle Quartet's recording of Beethoven's String Quartet 15, Op.132 (LP, Deutsche Grammophon/Speakers Corner 2530 728), the realistically sweet timbres left me with the aural equivalent of a sugar high—yet not an overdose.

But the sound of the Jadis was more than a mere tone feast. Just a few bars into the first movement of the Beethoven quartet, the Orchestra Reference made no secret of its dynamic expressiveness, owing to an apparently greater transient speed than I recall hearing from its more expen-

How accurate are MSB Clocks?

It takes light about 33 Femtoseconds to travel the thickness of a sheet of paper.

Light travels around the earth 7.5 times in one second.

Femto 33
1 sheet of paper

Femto 140
3 sheets of paper

Galaxy 77
2 sheets of paper

It's inconceivable that you can hear the difference!

This is the precision it takes to unravel the harshness and confusion of "dense" music like full orchestra and big band jazz. CDs are fully risen to hi res -- no tricks, no upsampling. Real voices, real instruments, real sound stages.

World's Lowest Jitter Clocks

Call Vince for a dealer near you.
(716) 686-3527
vince@msblech.com

MSB TECHNOLOGY
www.MSBTECH.COM



**Blue Velvet PHT Type I shown on cartridge*

PHT GROWN IN CALIFORNIA LEGAL IN ALL 50-STATES!

**Transform your
phono cartridge with PHT
Guaranteed Or your money back!**



\$125 each or \$199 for both strains!

- Latest evolution of our award winning UEF Technology
- Transforms phono SQ- just place on or near phono cartridge
- Improves clarity, lowers noise floor, increases sound staging
- Comes in 2 different strains w 2 distinct sonic perspectives
- Type S PHTs are all about clarity and musicality
- Type I PHTs sound holographic and ethereal
- A new crop of PHTs will be released every 90-days
- No-risk 30-day money back guarantee



SYNERGISTIC RESEARCH

NEVER COMPROMISE • SYNERGISTICRESEARCH.COM

sive stablemate. And the steady, stately way in which the Orchestra played the melody and chorale-like harmonies of the *Molto adagio* was further testament to its superb musical timing.

The Orchestra Reference's take on Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch* (two 45rpm LPs, Blue Note/Music Matters ST-84163) was no less engaging. First and foremost, the amp's musical performance was flawless: Each of the five selections on this beautiful, challenging album unfolded with good momentum and clarity of pitch and timing—the timing especially critical to performances such as these, in which multiple rhythmic streams sometimes flow past the listener's ears at the same time. With this record it also seemed that the Orchestra Reference had a fuller, weightier bass range than the more expensive I-35: Tony Williams's floor tom had excellent power and body in the angular "Straight Up and Down," and the same could be said of Richard Davis's double bass, although the sound of the latter left me wishing for greater clarity and, even more so, a little more texture.

Similarly, the Orchestra Reference allowed Ron Carter's double bass to be the real star of Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker's *Carnegie Hall Concert*, produced by Creed Taylor (CD, CBS ZK 40689). Especially in the extended take on "My Funny Valentine," Carter's pitch, pacing, and tone were taken to their apparent limits by the Jadis, which rose to the occasion with equal measures of control, weight, and beauty. Again, I wished for a bit more texture, a little more string and wood—qualities that aren't lacking in my EL34-powered reference amps, the Shindo Corton-Charlemagne monoblocks, or in other low-power EL34 amplifiers of my acquaintance. Those impressions endured throughout Mulligan's baritone-sax solo: The Jadis was musically nimble, easily following his counterpoint to Baker's distinctly full-bodied trumpet solo. The sound of Mulligan's horn was sufficient in texture, but only just so; I admit to a fondness for excess in that department, and I left the table very slightly hungry.

Strangely or not, the Jadis also directed my attention to the bass lines—electric this time—that Gerard Love plays throughout Teenage Fanclub's wonderful *Songs from Northern Britain* (CD, Creation/Columbia CK 68202). Don't get me wrong—the Orchestra Reference wasn't bass heavy in the

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Analog Sources Garrard 301, Thorens TD 124 turntables; Abis SA-1.2, EMT 997 tonearms; EMT OFD 25 & OFD 15 & TSD 15 pickup heads; Denon DL-103, Miyajima Premium BE Mono II cartridges.

Digital Sources Halide Designs DAC HD USB D/A converter; Apple iMac G5 computer running Audirvana Plus 1.5.12; Sony SCD-777 SACD/CD player.

Preamplification Hommage T2 step-up transformer, Shindo Laboratory Auriges Equalizer Amplifier phono preamplifier & Masseto preamplifier.

Power Amplifiers Shindo Laboratory Corton-Charlemagne monoblocks.

Loudspeakers Altec Valencia, DeVore Fidelity Orangutan O/96.

Cables USB: Wireworld Revelation 2.0. Interconnect: Audio Note AN-Vx, Nordost Blue Heaven, Shindo Laboratory Silver. Speaker: Auditorium 23, Nordost Blue Heaven.

Accessories Box Furniture Company D3S rack (source & amplification components), Audiodesksysteme Glass Vinyl Cleaner.—**Art Dudley**

least; it was about as perfectly balanced an amp as I've ever heard, and did a consistently good job of letting Norman Blake's crisp/chunky/jangly guitar sound crisp/chunky/jangly. In the extreme.

Throughout those recordings and others, the impression endured of the Orchestra Reference Mk.II sounding appropriately full and weighty—qualities that didn't come at the expense of its treble range, which was satisfying but nonfatiguing with well-made recordings. When the Jadis was asked to play something overly bright—eg, the bluegrass chestnut "Sawing on the Strings," from *The David Grisman Rounder Album*³ (LP, Rounder 0069)—it gave an honest but not ruthless account of overcrisp sibilants and zingy note attacks, while still providing decent amounts of timbral flesh and blood. And the Orchestra's musical strengths endured: It *nailed* how Todd Phillips's double bass propels this performance and serves as the melodic and harmonic anchor for every fast-arriving chord change. Thus the Orchestra Reference was exposed as no mere euphonic

³ A pity that Grisman's only less-than-good-sounding album is musically one of his very best!



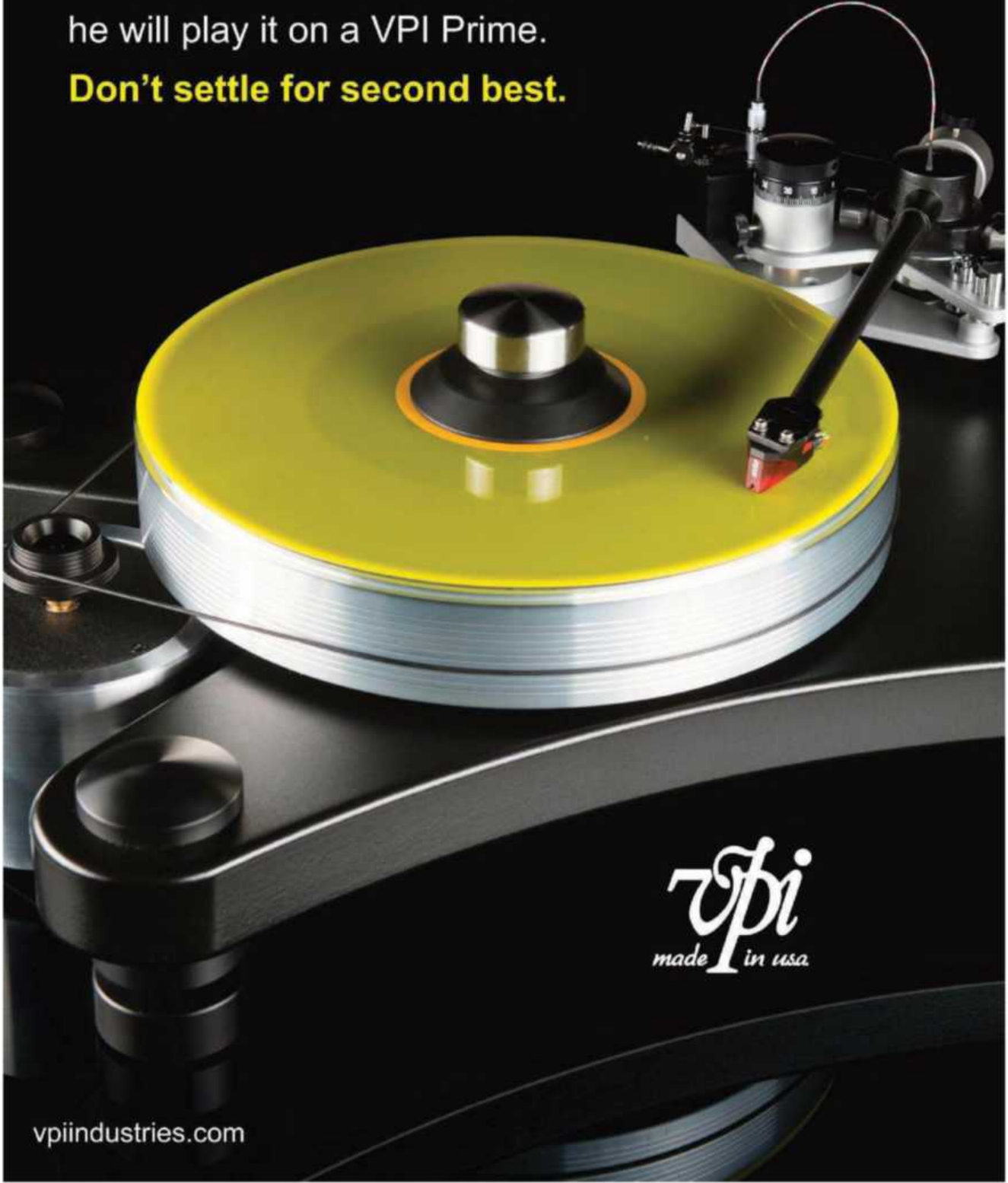
MBL's
Radialstrahler...
legendary
performance
since 1979



unique high end audio

mb1-northamerica.com
info@mb1-northamerica.com
(561) 735-9300

If your hi-fi dealer loves vinyl,
he will play it on a VPI Prime.
Don't settle for second best.



vpi
made in usa

vpiindustries.com

happy-lens: It let me hear the technical flaws in this recording, even as it let me enjoy it. A nice trick.

One Saturday morning, while still using the Jadis to power my Altec Valentias, I was compelled to play "21st Century Schizoid Man," from King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson King* (CD, Discipline Global DGM0501), at a mildly excessive volume level. The results were enjoyable, and I was again impressed by the Orchestra Reference's colorful way with timbres both acoustic and electric. But although its sound contained a good helping of drive and momentum in the temporal sense, that combination of speakers and amp seemed to lack a measure of sheer *oomph*. I switched over to my DeVore Fidelity Orangutan O/96 speakers and found that, perhaps counterintuitively, this combination produced a more powerful sound overall. Through the Jadis-DeVore combo, there was less contrast, less sculptural "relief," in the texture of Ian McDonald's sax, and Greg Lake's electric-bass lines didn't turn on quite so small a dime. But in virtually every other respect this combination was superior, and even seemed to allow the chaotic ending a greater increase in loudness than had the Altecs. For whatever reason, the slightly less sensitive DeVores allowed the Jadis to work more effectively and efficiently, to the pairing's sonic and musical advantage.

The combination of Jadis amp and DeVore speakers was also capable of far subtler dynamic contrasts—distinctions resolved sufficiently well that no more than two or three revolutions of the record were required to hear the greater levels of nuance in the late Claudio Abbado's 1969 recording, with the Vienna Philharmonic, of the Haas edition of the 1877 version of Bruckner's Symphony 1 (LP, London CS 6706), as compared with another Bruckner 1 in my collection: It was a contrast between incandescence and indifference. Throughout the Abbado recording, the Jadis reminded me of its beautifully realistic timbral colors—the oboes and flutes in the *Adagio* were exquisite—and of its generally excellent sense of forward momentum. Its performance with this record was also typical of the Orchestra Reference's spatial character in general: Those woodwinds weren't set *quite* as far back as through other amps—including what I recall of the Jadis I-35—which indicated a good but not exceptional

The amp is hand-wired, point-to point.

degree of imaging depth. By the same token, center-fill information wasn't as *present* or as finely focused as with the most spatially accomplished electronics. But the Orchestra Reference's sense of scale was, as suggested earlier, very satisfying overall, with the ability to sound big without sounding merely *puffy*.

Conclusions

Though identifiably *tubey* in a very good way, the Jadis Orchestra Reference Mk.II didn't press all of my EL34 buttons. The amp's sound was richly colorful and beautifully balanced, with very good musical drive, but a little short on the glorious (some might say excessive) texture I hear from my very favorite EL34-based power amps: that almost stringy quality the breed brings to small-scale classical and jazz recordings in particular. Yet the Jadis wasn't completely lacking in that department. In the long run, I could live with the Orchestra Reference Mk.II quite happily, especially given a great phono preamp to use with it.

I started near the bottom and worked my way down. It sounds like a stray lyric from a song by the Replacements, but it's an accurate if not terribly clever assessment of my history with the product line of Jadis S.A.R.L. of Villedubert, France. For me to continue on this trajectory, Jadis will have to come out with something—a phono preamp, maybe?—that offers even greater value for the dollar (or euro).

That would not be easy; for a (mostly) tubed integrated amplifier of this performance level to sell for under \$5000 is noteworthy. Unsurprisingly, much of the Orchestra Reference's direct competition would seem to be Asian, perhaps the most noteworthy example being the Line Magnetic LM-518IA integrated (\$4450), reviewed by Herb Reichert in the October 2015 *Stereophile*. I lack the opportunity for a direct comparison, but that doesn't prevent me from remarking on the joys of being blessed with such good choices.

Do try them all—but rest assured that the Jadis Orchestra Reference Mk.II is extremely unlikely to disappoint the music-loving, tone-loving audiophile who owns a pair of reasonably sensitive, easy-to-drive loudspeakers. Strongly recommended. ■



NIGHTHAWK

AROUND-THE-EAR
SEMI-OPEN HEADPHONES



Remarkably comfortable Nighthawk headphones not only don't feel like most headphones, they also don't give you that all-too-common "it's all happening inside my head" claustrophobia.

Listening through Nighthawk is like listening to a pair of **astonishingly coherent** near-field speakers. Emotionally compelling and totally immersive.

In addition to **proprietary new design elements and materials**, Nighthawk is the first headphone to apply many of the most advanced technologies previously only used in a few of the very best loudspeakers.

Please give Nighthawk a listen!

audioquest

$$\Sigma \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{future proof +} \\ \text{benchmark performance +} \\ \text{superlative sound} \end{array} \right) = \text{Rossini}$$



Future Proof

We are pioneers who are constantly developing new technologies to improve the quality of reproduced sound. Our unique approach to product design means that Rossini can anticipate and support new formats and innovations in audio.



Benchmark Performance

Every dCS product must meet the extraordinarily exacting standards demanded by our military heritage. As a result Rossini delivers levels of consistency and reliability like no other.



Superlative Sound

When you listen to Rossini our state of the art technology, manufacturing effort and rigorous testing combine to create a magical experience that perfectly recreates every last emotional nuance of whatever music you choose to listen to.

When you listen to Rossini from dCS you will believe that the world has stopped and there is...

ONLY THE MUSIC

dCS
ONLY THE MUSIC

LARRY GREENHILL

Mark Levinson No.585

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



In July 2000, I reviewed the Mark Levinson company's first integrated amplifier, the No.383, and found that its sound had "clarity, transparency, liquid mids and highs, with dynamic contrasts."¹ Also evident were the No.383's power-output limitations, the result of building large power supplies and heatsinks into a single case that

had to fulfill multiple functions. Still, the No.383's price of \$5900 was much less than the total cost of the equivalent in Mark Levinson separates. Later, in April 2007, I reviewed a similarly powered integrated amplifier, Bryston's B100-DA

¹ See *Stereophile*, July 2000, Vol.23 No.7: www.stereophile.com/integratedamps/245/index.html.

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Solid-state integrated stereo amplifier. Preamplifier section: Analog line-level inputs: 1 pair balanced (XLR), 3 pairs single-ended (RCA) inputs. Analog outputs: 1 pair single-ended (RCA). Input impedance: >45k ohms (RCA, XLR). Input overload: >5.5V RMS (RCA, XLR). Voltage gain, maximum volume setting: 40.7dB. Preamplifier section (digital): Digital audio inputs: 1 balanced AES/EBU (XLR), 2 coaxial S/PDIF (RCA), 2 optical (TosLink), 1 asynchro-

nous (USB-B). Bit depths: up to 32. PCM sampling rates: 32, 44.1, 48, 88.2, 96, 176.4, 192kHz. DSD: Up to DSD256. Amplifier section: Speaker connections: 1 pair banana/spade connectors with hurricane knobs. Output power: 200Wpc into 8 ohms (23dBW), 20Hz-20kHz. THD: <0.01% at 1kHz, 200W into 8 ohms. Frequency response: 20Hz-20kHz, ± 0.13 dB; 2Hz-250kHz, ± 0.2 dB/-3dB. Output impedance: ± 0.02 ohm into 20Hz. Damping factor: >400

at 20kHz into 8 ohms. Mains voltage: 100V, 115V, or 230V AC at 60Hz (set at factory). Power consumption: 1000W maximum (power on) into 8 ohms at rated output. Controller connectors: 1 RS-232 port (RJ-12 connector); 1 IR input ($\frac{1}{8}$ " phone jack); 1 programmable 12V DC trigger output ($\frac{1}{8}$ " phone jack), 100mA maximum; 1 programmable 12V DC trigger input ($\frac{1}{8}$ " phone jack); 1 Ethernet port (RJ-45) connector; 1 USB-A input. **Dimensions** 17.1" (438mm)

W by 6.8" (175mm) H without feet or 7.5" (193mm) H with feet by 19.8" (507mm) D. Weight: 71.7 lbs (32.6kg) net, 95.5 lbs (43.4kg) shipping. **Serial number of unit reviewed** 1317. **Price** \$12,000. Approximate number of dealers: 97. Warranty: 5 years. **Manufacturer** Mark Levinson, Harman Luxury Audio Group, 8500 Balboa Boulevard, Northridge, CA 91329. Tel: (888) 691-4171. Web: www.marklevinson.com.

experience **super fast** audio



Spectral DMC-30SV **"Super Veloce"** Reference Preamplifier

After years of extensive research into semiconductor "thermal memory" distortions in audio signals and the development of exclusive ultra-high-speed transistors, the **Spectral DMC-30SV "Super Veloce" Reference Preamplifier** sets a new benchmark in signal control and amplification. **The result is a startling increase in musical realism.**

Innovative Audio Video Showrooms has just completed a comprehensive renovation, creating a world-class venue in which to audition the very finest music systems.

Visit **Innovative** to experience **"Super Veloce"**.

INNOVATIVE
reference music systems

150 East 58th, Street Level, NYC +1.212.634.4444
innovativeaudiovideo.com info@iavny.com



Unusually, the No.585 uses card-frame construction.

(\$3195), which included a built-in DAC.²

Since July 2000, Class A and B of *Stereophile's* "Recommended Components" have swollen from 17 to a total of 29 integrated amplifiers. The April 2015 edition of the list shows prices of most integrations (with the exception of Bel Canto Design's Black system) to be lower than those of comparable component audio systems, and ranging from \$3300 to \$14,000. Integrations have continued to be popular in these pages. Within the last 12 months alone, we have reviewed and recommended nine integrated amplifiers—three

including built-in DACs—ranging in price from \$799 to \$50,000, in weight from 2.9 to 77 lbs, and in power output from 22 to 300Wpc.

At the 2015 Consumer Electronics Show, the Harman Luxury Audio Group introduced a new Mark Levinson integrated amplifier, the No.585, designed to be compatible with present-day multichannel surround systems and to handle digital signals with an internal, DSD-capable DAC—and managed by a sophisticated and intuitive user interface. When an opportunity arose to review the No.585, I jumped.

What's New

The Mark Levinson No.585 delivers 200Wpc into 8 ohms, provides 6 digital inputs, and sells for \$12,000—double the No.383 in all three parameters. New to the '585 are its line-level outputs, its digital-to-analog converter that handles both PCM and DSD digital music files, and is equipped with Harman International's proprietary Clari-Fi circuit for reconstructing compressed digital audio files. The exterior heatsinks of its predecessor have given way to a combination of internal heatsinks and vents in the top and bottom plates, and the new amp's exterior is further streamlined by leaving off the No.383's rear handles. The No.585 is 0.31" narrower, 0.35" taller, and 2.8" deeper—but only 7 lbs heavier—than the No.383. (Even so, the No.585 is Mark Levinson's lightest amplifier.)

Controls & Input/Output Interface

The No.585 resembles Mark Levinson's flagship stereo preamplifier, the No.52 Reference Preamplifier.³ A Standby button is centrally placed, low on the faceplate. In standby

2 See *Stereophile*, April 2007, Vol.30 No.4: www.stereophile.com/integratedamps/407bryston/index.html.

3 See www.stereophile.com/content/high-performance-harman-international.

MEASUREMENTS

I measured the Mark Levinson No.585 using my Audio Precision SYS2722 system (see the January 2008 "As We See It" at www.stereophile.com/content/measurements-maps-precision). As usual, before measuring the amplifier I preconditioned it by running both channels at one-third power into 8 ohms for an hour. However, the No.585

turned its output off after 35 minutes, its front panel displaying "Over Temperature." The top panel was hot, at 115.4°F (46.4°C), and the heatsinks even hotter, at 149.8°F (65.4°C). I unplugged the amplifier from the wall and let it cool down, after which I could turn it on again and continue testing.

I looked first at the performance of the digital inputs, using the setup menu

to disable the power-amp section and set the line output level to Fixed. I used both S/PDIF TosLink data from the Audio Precision SYS2722 and USB data from my MacBook Pro running on battery power. Apple's USB Prober utility identified the No.585 as "USB2.0 High-Speed True HD Audio" from "HARMAN" and indicated that the No.585's

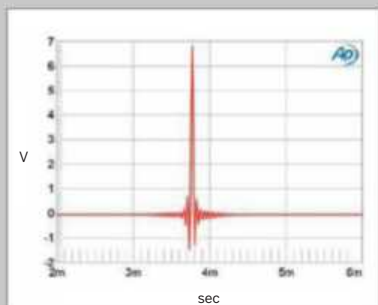


Fig.1 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, Fast filter, impulse response at 44.1kHz (4ms time window).

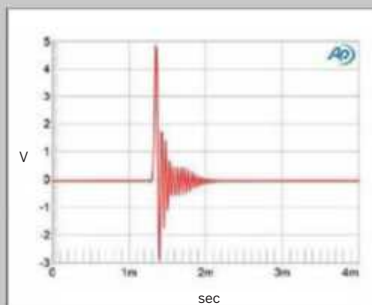


Fig.2 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, Minimum Phase filter, impulse response at 44.1kHz (4ms time window).

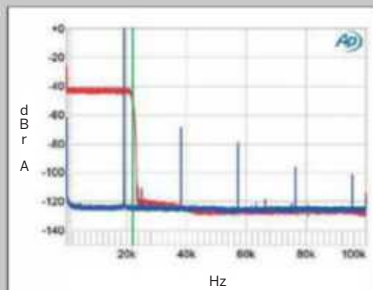


Fig.3 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, Minimum Phase filter, wideband spectrum of white noise at -4dBFS (left channel red, right magenta) and 19.1kHz tone at OdBFS (left blue, right cyan), with data sampled at 44.1kHz (20dB/vertical div.).

B1d

www.vividaudio.com



"IS THE ARTIST IN THE ROOM?" Music Seminar Series

U. S. Debut of Vivid Audio's *B1d*

Saturday, December 5th, 2015

1 pm to 3 pm or 4 pm to 6 pm



audio · video · design

Music Lovers

2116 Blake St, Berkeley, CA
Space is limited - please RSVP
510-558-1000

To mark our tenth year of manufacturing ground-breaking loudspeaker designs we are re-issuing our very first product; the OVAL B1, in a limited edition. Using cabinet materials and driver designs developed for our flagship Giya series, the B1decade uses a sandwich composite for the main enclosure and new versions of the drivers.

On a Higher Note | www.onahighernote.com | info@onahighernote.com | 949-544-1990

Vivid Audio | www.vividaudio.com | info@vividaudio.com



VIVID audio
auditory acuity



mode, all circuits up to the output stage remain powered, shortening warm-up time and lengthening average component life. Two large knobs—Input on the left, Volume on the right—flank the display and the other controls. Just below the display is a row of pushbuttons; from left to right, these are Polarity, Setup, Enter (for saving setup changes), Display Intensity, Balance, and Mute. These switches are duplicated on the No.585's slim, well-balanced remote-control handset. Also on the remote are buttons for controlling USB playback functions—Play, Pause, Fast-Forward, Fast-Back—and enabling the DAC's Clari-Fi feature.

On the No.585's rear panel are three rows of input connectors, flanked by a stereo pair of speaker connectors with "hurricane" knobs (so named for their similarity to the hurricane symbols seen on weather maps). The top row of connectors is devoted to analog signals, the middle row to digital, and the bottom row to the No.585's control functions. The analog connectors include a pair of RCA line-level outputs, three RCA inputs, and one pair of Swiss-made XLR inputs. The line-level output connectors can be set as fixed or variable, the latter setting optimal for driving a powered subwoofer(s). An internal 80Hz, second-order high-pass filter can be configured and activated through the No.585's menu system, to filter audio sent to the main speakers, while the line-level subwoofer outputs remain full range.

The row of digital connectors comprises one AES/EBU, two S/PDIF coax, two optical, and one asynchronous USB Type B. In the bottom row are an Ethernet port, a 3.5mm minijack for an external infrared receiver module, an RS-232 (RJ-11) port, a USB Type A socket, and trigger input/output connectors for a 12V trigger signal to turn the No.585 on and off. Just to the right side of this bottom row is a combination AC mains socket and power switch.

Conservative Design Philosophy

Todd Eichenbaum, director of engineering for Harman's Luxury Audio Group, explained that the No.585 was the first commercial consumer product entirely designed by the 12-person team at Mark Levinson's new facility in Shelton, Connecticut, where all listening tests and QC checks are also performed. Manufacturing is done at Mack Technologies, in Westford, Massachusetts, which has the capacity to track every circuit board and its level of revision, and organize these data into an easily retrievable database for continuing quality control and service needs.

The ML design team prioritized those functions that directly affected the No.585's purity of sound quality, and excluded such things as a headphone jack, a record/monitor loop, and a phono stage—the last omitted because it would have required expensive low-level circuitry and additional shielding. Rather than exotic PCB dielectrics, such as those used in the No.52 preamplifier and No.53 power amp, the No.585 has FR-4 glass-epoxy PCBs with gold-finished traces, at a fraction of the former's cost. While its audio circuits use military-spec thin-film or tantalum-nitride resistors at key points, the No.585 does not have large, expensive capacitors—all audio circuits are direct-coupled.

The design of the No.585's power supplies follows this approach: One small supply handles housekeeping functions when the integrated amplifier is in standby; another provides power for all digital and control circuits. Separate secondary windings from a single 900VA toroidal power transformer power the left and right line-level analog circuits and the left and right power-amp channels. Having separate sets of secondary windings effectively separates the left and right channels from each other in the same way that separate transformers do. In addition, one channel's wind-

measurements, continued

USB input operated in the optimal isochronous asynchronous mode. The USB port operated at all sample rates from 44.1 to 192kHz.

Full-scale data at 1kHz gave rise to a signal level of 5.16V at the fixed Line outputs, while with the volume control set to its maximum, the amplifier's speaker outputs were close to clipping with a 1kHz signal at -20dBFS. As

each input's maximum gain can be set independently, it would be a good idea to reduce the amount of gain for the No.585's digital inputs in order to be able to use the volume control over a sensible range. The digital inputs preserved absolute polarity at the Line output when set to Non-Inverting, but inverted polarity at the speaker outputs. I didn't test the Clari-Fi circuit

because I wasn't sure how to do so in an effective manner.

The digital input's impulse response varied according to the reconstruction filter selected. With the filter set to Fast, the impulse response was a conventional, time-symmetrical type (fig.1). The Slow filter's impulse response was similar, but with fewer coefficients (not shown), while with

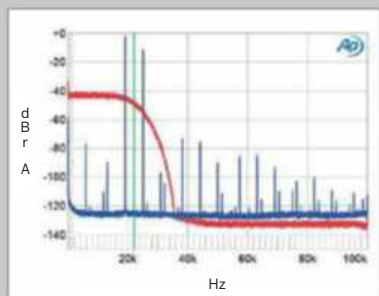


Fig.4 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, Slow filter, wideband spectrum of white noise at -4dBFS (left channel red, right magenta) and 19.1kHz tone at 0dBFS (left blue, right cyan), with data sampled at 44.1kHz (20dB/vertical div.).

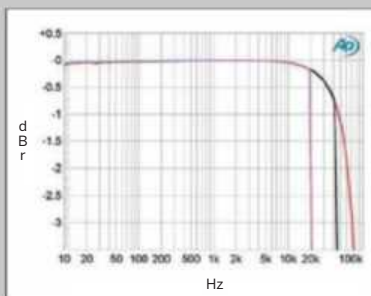


Fig.5 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, Fast filter, frequency response at -12dBFS into 100k ohms with data sampled at: 44.1kHz (left channel cyan, right magenta), 96kHz (left green, right gray), 192kHz (left blue, right red) (0.5dB/vertical div.).

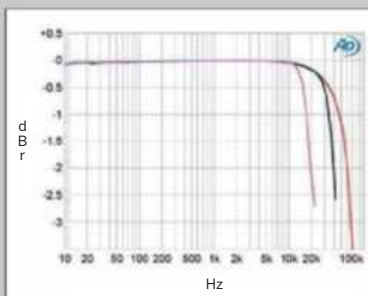


Fig.6 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, Slow filter, frequency response at -12dBFS into 100k ohms with data sampled at: 44.1kHz (left channel cyan, right magenta), 96kHz (left green, right gray), 192kHz (left blue, right red) (0.5dB/vertical div.).



Pure musical joy
Timeless elegance
Handmade in U.S.A.

 **YG ACOUSTICS™**
www.yg-acoustics.com +1-801-726-3887

ings can “borrow” unused capacity from the other as needed. The line-level power supplies for the left and right channels employ linear regulators, which isolate them from AC mains fluctuations or demands from the amplifier channels.

Construction

The No.585 is built on a chassis of steel and aluminum. The amplifier circuits are mounted on internal heatsinks, with openings in the bottom and top plates to vent heat without the need for fans. The circuit boards are mounted horizontally in evenly spaced layers using a card-cage architecture, in which each function is implemented on a separate circuit board; these boards include ones for the preamplifier, the DAC, and digital input processing (USB). This approach isolates the low-level analog and digital circuits from the power supplies and amplifier modules.

Eichenbaum designed the two-channel line-level preamplifier, which incorporates fully discrete, mirror-imaged, dual-mono analog circuits, with individual signal-switching relays for each of the four stereo inputs: one XLR, three RCA. Volume controls employ discrete, 15-bit, R-2R ladders and low-noise analog switches. The gain-level offset function in the No.585's setup menu allows the user to establish the optimal volume level for each input.

An option new to Mark Levinson integrateds is the No.585's built-in DAC. Its USB audio receiver is based on a C-Media 6632A processor, which is fully specified up to



The No.585's binding posts resemble the “hurricane” symbols on weather maps.

The preamplifier incorporates fully discrete, mirror-imaged, dual-mono analog circuits.

32-bit 192kHz PCM and DSD256. (Eichenbaum adds, “We have not evaluated it at 384kHz or DSD512; it may or may not work at one or both of those.”) The DAC itself, based on a 32-bit ESS 9018K2M Sabre D/A chip, is paired with a discrete current-to-voltage converter, an antialiasing filter, and a proprietary jitter-rejection circuit. The No.585's menu lets the user pick one of three different filter characteristics for digital streams with PCM content: Fast rolloff, Slow rolloff, or Minimum Phase impulse response. There's also the above-mentioned Clari-Fi algorithm, which, according to the owner's manual, “analyzes compressed digital audio files during playback and reconstructs much of what was lost

measurements, continued

the Minimum Phase filter, all ringing followed the impulse, as expected (fig.2).

Tested with white noise sampled at 44.1kHz (fig.3, red and magenta traces), wideband spectral analysis¹ revealed that both the Minimum Phase and Fast filters rolled off the output very rapidly above half the sample rate (fig.3, vertical green line),

with maximum attenuation reached between 23 and 24kHz. The aliased image at 25kHz of a full-scale 19.1kHz tone is therefore suppressed by 115dB (blue and cyan traces). However, the distortion harmonics associated with this tone are higher than usual, the second harmonic at 38.1kHz lying at -70dB (0.03%). With the Slow filter, the white noise begins to roll off in the top audio octave (fig.4), the aliasing

tone at 25kHz is suppressed by only 12dB, and many other aliasing products are visible.

Fig.5 shows a more conventional frequency-response graph with the Fast filter, taken with data sampled at 44.1, 96, and 192kHz. The overall response conforms to the same basic shape at all three sample rates, with a

¹ My thanks to Jürgen Reis, chief engineer of MBL, for suggesting this test.

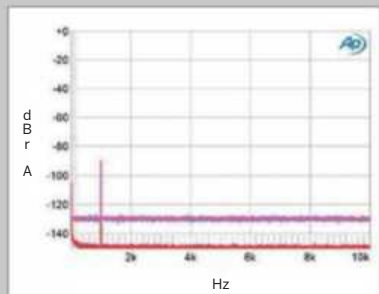


Fig.7 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, spectrum with noise and spuriae of dithered 1kHz tone at -90dBFS with: 16-bit data (left channel cyan, right magenta), 24-bit data (left blue, right red) (20dB/vertical div.).

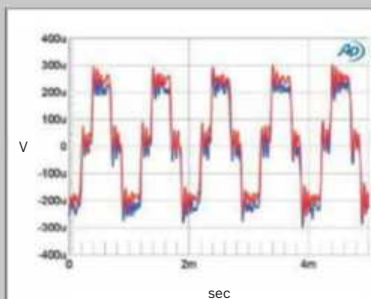


Fig.8 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, waveform of undithered 1kHz sinewave at -90.31dBFS, 16-bit data (left channel blue, right red).

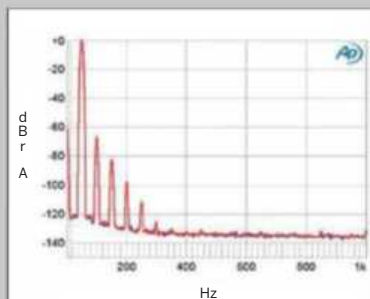


Fig.9 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, spectrum of 50Hz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 0dBFS into 100k ohms (linear frequency scale).

S O t M

Ultimate High Performance Audio

Battery powered DAC & Pre-amplifier : sDP-1000EX

Network music server & player : sMS-1000SQ

Stereo D-class power amplifier : sPA1000



Through the sMS-1000SQ it sounded wonderful; tight, focused, with pinpoint spatial accuracy. Each instrument was clearly defined and nicely voiced. Bass response may have taken the most noticeable sound quality hit as it became less distinct and more bloated.

By Michael Lavorgna, Audiostream

www.sotm-audio.com

www.sotm.sonore.us

in the compression process.” The circuit’s software-based Intensity control, available via either the amp’s setup menu or a dedicated button on the remote handset, adjusts the amount of reconstruction applied to the signal.

Two fully differential, class-AB, 200W amplifiers, based on modules from the No.535H five-channel amplifier, comprise the output section. These employ 12 power transistors per channel, and these modules are reportedly chosen for their small size, low power requirements, and superior reliability. They enable the No.585 to deliver 200Wpc RMS into 8 ohms, and 350Wpc into 4 ohms.

The No.585’s power-amp section is protected from internal and external component failures by some of the most extensive precautions I’ve seen in some time. A mains relay, driven by the AC line voltage and frequency-sensing circuitry, manages standby current consumption and protects the No.585 from various fault conditions. Protection circuits continuously monitor the amplifier’s output current, DC level, and ultrasonic content, and send this information to a microprocessor that then prevents damage to the No.585 and/or speakers. Protection against overheating is provided by two sensors on each channel’s amplifier, and by two thermal switches inside the power-transformer housing.

Setup

Todd Eichenbaum brought the No.585 to my listening room, and helped me install it in my system. Knowing that I listen to classical music, he suggested that I select the DAC’s minimum-phase filter to process PCM digital music streams. Eichenbaum explained that, rather than print a manual for the No.585, Mark Levinson decided to post it on their website for easy downloading, so that it can be quickly updated and made available to users at no cost whenever new

The No.585’s DAC is equipped with Harman International’s proprietary Clari-Fi circuit for reconstructing compressed digital audio files.

firmware becomes available. The No.585 is accompanied by only a thick booklet of Quick Setup Instructions.

The No.585’s 71.7lb weight was too much for my wall-mounted shelves, so we placed it atop my Velodyne subwoofer (not used for this review), which sits against the room’s front wall, 7’ behind and midway between my Quad ESL-989 speakers. I then moved my digital source components—a Bryston BCD-1 CD transport, BDP-2 media player, and BDA-2 DAC—out of the wall system and placed them next to the No.585. I ran a digital interconnect from the AES/EBU port on the BDP-2 to the corresponding digital input on the No.585. FM radio signals from my Day-Sequerra FM tuner arrived at one of the No.585’s three RCA inputs via unbalanced interconnects.

I perched my Lenovo W510 laptop computer atop the Bryston stack, and connected it to the No.585 via a USB link. I downloaded from the Mark Levinson website and installed on the Lenovo the appropriate USB driver, thus allowing the laptop to recognize the No.585 as a USB device. I also downloaded and installed JRiver’s Media Control software, so that I could stream DSD files from the Lenovo’s 200GB solid-state drive.

Speaker cables ran directly from the No.585’s hurricane terminals to the Quads, and interconnects ran to my Tannoy TS2.12 powered subwoofer from the No.585’s line-level output. I adjusted the sub’s acoustic output to complement

measurements, continued

sharp rolloff just below half the rate at 44.1 and 96kHz. While the Minimum Phase frequency responses were identical, the Slow filter gave a slower rolloff at all three sample rates (fig.6), with the 44.1kHz response down by 2dB at 20kHz. Channel separation at 1kHz was superb, at >120dB in both directions below 2kHz.

Fed dithered data representing a 1kHz tone at -90dBFS with first

16-bit data (fig.7, cyan and magenta traces), then 24-bit data (blue, red), the increase in bit depth dropped the noise floor by around 20dB, suggesting resolution of at least 19 bits. No spurious can be seen with 24-bit data, and repeating this test with USB data revealed that the No.585 correctly handled 24-bit data via this input. With its high resolution and very low noise, the No.585 reproduced undithered

16-bit data describing a sine wave at exactly -90.31dBFS in exemplary manner (fig.8), with zero DC offset, the three DC voltage levels well differentiated, and with the Minimum Phase filter characteristic clearly evident. With undithered 24-bit data, the No.585 output a well-formed sine wave despite the very low signal level.

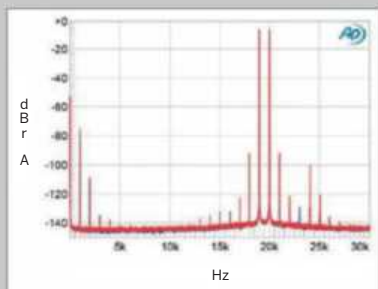


Fig.10 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, Minimum Phase filter, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-30kHz, 19+20kHz at 0dBFS peak into 100k ohms (linear frequency scale).

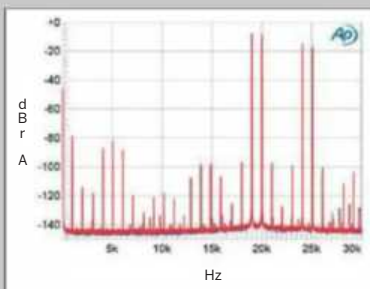


Fig.11 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, Slow filter, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-30kHz, 19+20kHz at 0dBFS peak into 100k ohms (linear frequency scale).

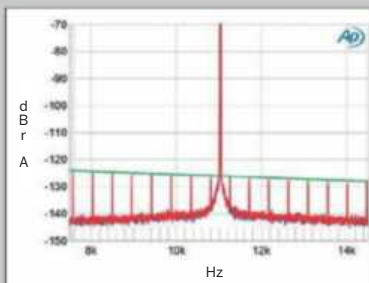


Fig.12 Mark Levinson No.585, digital input, high-resolution jitter spectrum of analog output signal, 11.025kHz at -6dBFS, sampled at 44.1kHz with LSB toggled at 229Hz: 16-bit data from SYS2722 via TosLink (left channel blue, right red). Center frequency of trace, 11.025kHz; frequency range, ±3.5kHz.

Unexpected wireless performance:
just what you'd expect from MartinLogan



The MartinLogan Wireless Ensemble



Count on MartinLogan to set the bar higher. Like giving a luxury 5-channel soundbar the ability to stream wireless audio over your Wi-Fi network. DTS Play-Fi® technology streams high-resolution audio to the new Motion Vision X Soundbar, or to any of MartinLogan's new wireless ensemble. Build a whole-home wireless audio system, with easy app control for Android, iOS, Kindle Fire or PC devices. Finally, wireless products with MartinLogan performance.



the Quads', until the histogram bars in the real-time analyzer (RTA) function of my Studio Six iTestMic were level at 100 and 30Hz.

I did most of my listening in the nearfield with my current reference speakers, the Quad ESL-989s or Revel Ultima Salon2s. The Quads' inner edges were 6' 8" apart; the left speaker was 18" from its sidewall, the right speaker 18" from a built-in wall unit; both were 5' 5" from the front wall. The Tannoy TS2.12 (review in the works) was in the room's right front corner, 3' behind the right-channel Quad. I heard the best imaging and soundstaging when the Quads and my listening seat approximated an 8' equilateral triangle, measured from the centers of the full-range arrays. More precisely, I sat 7' 8" from each Quad and 10' 8" from the Tannoy.

All that done, it was time to run the No.585's own setup routine. I set the No.585's line-level outputs to Variable, and turned on the amp's high-pass filter to the speaker outputs to shield the Quads from deep bass signals. Playing "Silver Springs," from Fleetwood Mac's *The Dance* (CD, Reprise 46702-2), I adjusted the Tannoy sub's output until Stevie Nicks's smoky voice sounded clear, open, and free of chesty coloration.

Immediately drawn into and involved in the music, I soon realized that I'd inadvertently increased the volume until the No.585's display read 62dB. Mick Fleetwood's drums were rendered with enough power and solidity that the Quads began to cut out on peaks. Soon, the No.585 went silent, and its display announced that it had an overheat fault condition. Sure enough, the areas of the top plate nearest the internal heatsinks were almost too hot to touch. I switched the amp into standby, but it continued to display the fault message. I reached around to the back and flipped the main

power switch, waited one minute, then flipped it back on. The No.585 began its normal turn-on sequence: I hadn't broken it. Whew!

But then I listened to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, in the recording by Eiji Oue and the Minnesota Orchestra (DVD with WAVE file, Reference RR-70 HDCD). I was playing a copy of this file I'd made on a USB thumb drive, and it ends with a burst of static—to which the No.585 responded by displaying "LEFT CHANNEL OVER CURRENT" and shutting down. Again, the heatsinks were very hot. I switched off the amp, unplugged it, waited 10 seconds, plugged it in, and turned it on. Again, all was fine.

In a subsequent e-mail exchange, Eichenbaum wrote, "This operation of the No.585 is exactly as we intended. Temperature sensors on each amplifier monitor the heatsink temperature and prevent it from increasing to a level that is unsafe to either the user or the unit itself. The No.585 puts itself into a forced standby mode at that point so everything cools off." He reminded me that the Quad ESL-989s' protection circuits are triggered by power levels exceeding 100W, which the No.585 can easily exceed. Setting the amp's volume too high and triggering the Quads' protection circuits "could have demanded way over the No.585's rated 200Wpc while only producing a low sound level pressure."

Test of Time: Listening and Ergonomics

A busy travel schedule meant that my listening sessions with the Mark Levinson were spread over several months. This turned out to be fortuitous, as I slowly learned to appreciate the No.585's unique features: its highly involving sound, superb integration with my music sources, and a user interface that provided greater control over my listening experience than I'd ever had. I realized that this integrated amplifier was

measurements, continued

Correlating with fig.3, full-scale data at 50Hz produced a second-harmonic component just above -70dB (fig.9), though dropping the signal level by 10dB reduced the level of all distortion harmonics by 20dB. Tested with an equal mix of 19 and 20kHz tones, the Levinson's intermodulation distortion with the Fast and Minimum Phase filters was low (fig.10), though the Slow

filter introduced a slew of aliasing products (fig.11). Other than some spectral spreading around the spike that represents the high-level tone at one-quarter the sample rate (fig.12), all the odd-order harmonics of the low-frequency, LSB-level squarewave were reproduced at the correct level, as indicated by the green line in this graph.

The No.585's analog inputs offered a maximum gain of 40.9dB for both balanced and unbalanced signals, this the norm for an integrated amplifier,

and inverted the signal polarity, again with the amplifier set to Non-Inverting. The input impedance was the same for balanced and unbalanced signals, at 44k ohms at 20Hz and 1kHz, dropping inconsequentially to 37.5k ohms at 20kHz. The volume control operated in steps of close to 0.2dB, each displayed reduction by "10" accompanied by a reduction in gain of 10dB.

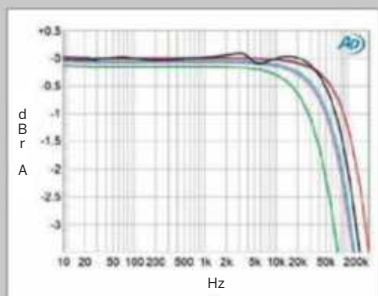


Fig.13 Mark Levinson No.585, volume control set to maximum ("80"), frequency response at 2.83V into: simulated loudspeaker load (gray), 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red), 4 ohms (left cyan, right magenta), 2 ohms (green) (0.5dB/vertical div.).

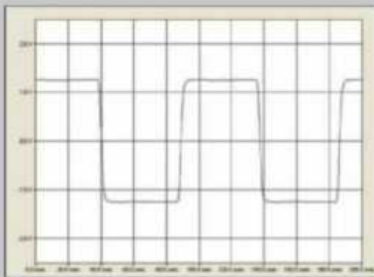


Fig.14 Mark Levinson No.585, small-signal, 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

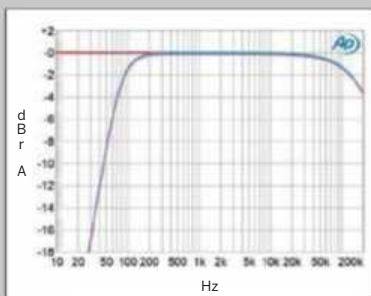


Fig.15 Mark Levinson No.585, volume control set to "60," frequency response at 2.83V into 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red) and with high-pass filter activated into 8 ohms (left cyan, right magenta) (2dB/vertical div.).

Digital Audio Redefined...



LUMIN

Audiophile Network Music Players S1, A1, A1B, T1, D1

- Lumin app for iPad • Lundahl transformers • Variable bit rate/UPnP
- DSD to PCM/PCM to DSD • Commercial broadcast engineering
- External dual mono AC/DC linear power • Up to 32/384 PCM-DXD, DSD, DSD128 (S1)
- Dual DAC output with up to 16 mono DACs per channel (S1), Dual mono board designs
- Play from virtually any connected drive; USB, Flash, PC, L1, NAS, Airplay

L1 2TB HDD Music Library

www.luminmusic.com



Distributed in the USA by Source Systems, Ltd. • San Clemente, CA. 92672 • 949-369-7729 • email: sourcesystems@cox.net
© 2015 Source Systems Ltd. All rights reserved. All trademarks are the property of their respective owners. www.sourcesystemsltd.com

Vandersteen Model Seven Mk II REFERENCE SPEAKER, REDEFINED

THE BEST—In Their Words

the absolute sound®

BEST OF SHOW—Munich High-End 2015

BEST OF SHOW—T.H.E. Newport 2015

The Audio Beat

BEST OF SHOW—CES 2015

BEST OF SHOW—T.H.E. Newport 2015



VANDERSTEEN AUDIO vandersteen.com 559-582-0324 Made in the USA



one of the most involving audio products I've encountered in some time.

The extended listening period also allowed me to gradually depend more and more on the No.585's remote control. Once I'd matched the levels of my source components, I could effortlessly switch between them—something I can't do with my reference standalone preamplifiers. And being able to effortlessly adjust the volume from my listening chair revealed a quirk of the Quads' electronics: Each change in volume level briefly tripped the Quads' protection circuits, temporarily muddying the sound. That never happened with my reference dynamic speakers, Revel's Ultima Salon2s.

The No.585's high-pass filter and line-level outputs are some of the best I've heard in a two-channel product. Unlike the high-pass filters built into all but the most expensive subwoofers, those in the No.585 preserved the purity of sound throughout the upper bass, mids, and highs: Those regions were not colored, distorted, or flattened. And because the Quad ESL-989s were relieved of deep-bass duties, they sounded significantly better than before with rock, pipe organ, and classical recordings of wide dynamic range. The huge drum sound at the beginning of "Hotel California," from the Eagles' *Hell Freezes Over* (CD, GEFD 24725), was tighter, less diffuse, and more precisely positioned in space. Lyle Lovett's voice in "Friend of the Devil," from *Dedicated: A Tribute to the Grateful Dead* (CD, Arista ARCD 8669), presented a stunningly realistic aural hologram, with none of the chestiness and honk I'd heard from the Quads through other crossovers. With certain recordings, particularly of choral works, I preferred the Quads (with the Tannoy subwoofer) to the Revels.

In addition, the bass from the small Tannoy sub had better pitch definition and spaciousness and sounded more

Its built-in DAC is a jewel, producing some of the best sound I've heard in my listening room.

dynamic with the No.585 than with either of my reference preamps. John Atkinson's high-resolution recording of Jonas Nordwall performing the *Toccata* from Widor's Organ Symphony 5 (24-bit/88.2kHz AIFF file) delivered pedal notes of remarkable solidity and mass, but that were also clearly defined, fast, and clean. Oue's *Rite of Spring* recording came through with the full dynamic range of its pulsing timpani and thudding bass drum intact. Organist James Busby's performance of Herbert Howells's *Master Tallis's Testament*, on *Pipes Rhode Island* (CD, Riago 101), shook objects on the shelves!

I became increasingly involved with my music collection. Spurred on by the No.585's effortless power and ease of use, and the Quads' spaciousness and three-dimensionality of imaging, I began to listen to entire selections rather than specific segments that featured a particular audio quality. This was most evident when I listened to the DSD64 file of the 2010/2011 recording of Beethoven's Symphony 7, with the San Francisco Symphony conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas (available at sanfranciscosymphony.downloads.net/beethoven-7). Only weeks before, I'd heard this work in concert for the first time, in a transformative performance in New York City with Edward Gardner conducting the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra. I'd been amazed at the music's fervor and dynamics, and the textures and timbres of the many instruments, each distinctly audible—and the emotional response of the audience, who applauded "to the

measurements, continued

The output impedance at low and middle frequencies (including 6' of speaker cable) was low, at 0.07 ohm, rising to 0.16 ohm at the top of the audio band. The variations in the No.585's frequency response with our standard simulated loudspeaker were therefore very small (fig.13, gray trace). Fig.13 indicates that the No.585's small-signal response is very wide, the -3dB point lying at 190kHz. As a result, the amplifier's reproduction of a 10kHz square-

wave featured very short risetimes but no overshoot or ringing (fig.14). Fig.13 was taken with the volume control set to its maximum of "80." Repeating the measurement with it set to "60" (ie, -20dB) commendably gave an identical result (fig.15). This graph also shows the response with the high-pass filter activated. The output is down by 3dB at 80Hz and by 10dB at 45Hz.

Channel separation via the analog inputs was excellent, at 100dB in both

directions below 10kHz. The wideband, unweighted signal/noise ratio, ref. 2.83V and taken with the unbalanced input shorted to ground but the volume control set to its maximum—very much the worst case—was moderate, at 72.75dB. The ratio improved by 10dB when the measurement bandwidth was restricted to the audio band and by another 2dB when A-weighted. Spectral analysis revealed that the

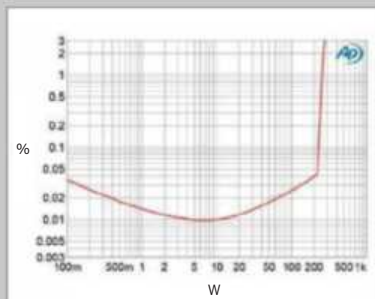


Fig.16 Mark Levinson No.585, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms.

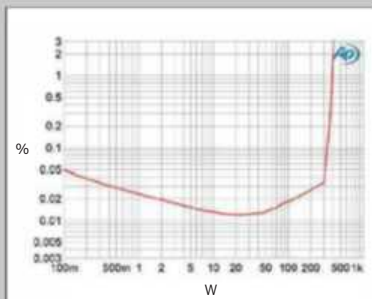


Fig.17 Mark Levinson No.585, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 4 ohms.

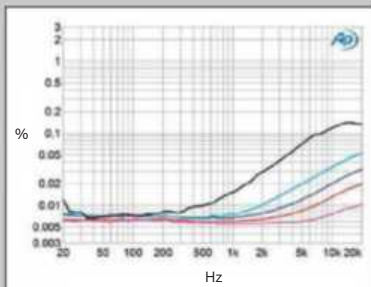


Fig.18 Mark Levinson No.585, THD+N (%) vs frequency at 12.65V into: 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red), 4 ohms (left cyan, right magenta), 2 ohms (gray).



Audioengine 2+ Premium Powered Desktop Speakers shown in Gloss Red. Only \$249/pair.



Rediscover your music.

Pair the award-winning **Audioengine powered speakers** with your favorite turntable for a great-sounding (and affordable) hi-fi system.

Fast and easy setup
Multiple inputs, including USB
Subwoofer output
Wireless options available
All cables included

Machines for music.
audioengineusa.com



point of ecstasy” (as the concert’s program notes described the reaction of Symphony 7’s very first audience, on December 8, 1813). Now, listening to the Tilson Thomas recording, I was reminded of being surrounded by the music, the clearly defined sounds of the instruments, and the ambience of Avery Fisher Hall.

Conclusions

Mark Levinson’s No.585 is the most expensive integrated amplifier I have reviewed. At 200Wpc, it’s more powerful than all but one of the integrals listed in our “Recommended Components”—the Bel Canto Black. Its built-in DAC is a jewel, producing some of the best sound I’ve heard in my listening room, and equaling the performance of the standalone DACs I had on hand. Unquantifiable as they are, the No.585’s sonic purity and ergonomics—its sophisticated but intuitive menu structure, and its simple but versatile remote control—made it easy for me to be drawn into the music again and again. I knew how much I liked it when I turned it over to JA for testing; I had to have it back for one last listen.

The doubling of its predecessor’s power output, the addition of a superb DAC, and the unmatched sophistication of the No.585’s easily learned control system set the new model apart from every other integrated amplifier I’ve reviewed. While its integration with my Quad electrostatics wasn’t the smoothest, the sound was the very best I’ve gotten from those speakers. Which is why I’m giving the No.585 a strong Class A “Recommended Components” rating. ■

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Analog Sources Linn Sondek LP12 turntable with Lingo power supply, Linn Ittok tonearm, Spectral moving-coil cartridge; Day-Sequerra Anniversary Reference FM tuner.

Digital Sources Bryston BCD-1 CD player & BDP-2 media player (with IAD sound board) & BDA-2 DAC; Lenovo W510 laptop computer running Windows 7 (64 bit), Mark Levinson USB driver, JRiver Media Center 20.

Preamplifiers Bryston BP-26, Mark Levinson ML-7.

Power Amplifier Mark Levinson No.334.

Loudspeakers Quad ESL-989, Revel Ultima Salon2; Tannoy TS2.12 subwoofer.

Cables Digital: Wireworld Starlight coaxial. Interconnect (single-ended): Mark Levinson Silver, Red Rose Silver One, Totem Acoustic Sinew. Interconnect (balanced): Bryston, Pure Silver. Speaker: Coincident Speaker Technology CST 1, Pure Silver R50 biwire, QED X-TUBE 400, Ultralink Excelsior 6N OFHC.

Accessories Studio Six iTestMic audio analyzer, Apple iPhone6, Apple iPad, Torus Power Isolation Unit AO24-ACB-A1AB (120V, 20A max, 2400VA, 10 outlet). Listening room: 26’ L by 13’ W by 12’ H with semi-cathedral ceiling, moderately furnished with sound-absorbing furniture. Left wall has large bay window covered by Hunter Douglas Duette Honeycomb fabric shades. At rear, 8’ by 4’ doorway opens into 25’ by 15’ kitchen. —Larry Greenhill

measurements, continued

primary noise components were odd-order harmonics of the AC supply, perhaps due to magnetic interference from the amplifier’s massive toroidal transformer.

Specified at 200Wpc into 8 ohms (23dBW), the No.585 exceeded this power output by 1dB, clipping at 250Wpc into 8 ohms with both channels driven (fig.16). Into 4 ohms with both channels, the Levinson clipped at 390Wpc (22.9dBW, fig.17), though it is fair to note that the wall voltage had dropped from 122V AC with the amplifier quiescent to 117.5V AC at the

clipping point into this load. When I repeated the test into 2 ohms with one channel driven, the No.585 turned itself off at 395W, its front panel displaying “Over Current.” Again, unplugging the amplifier from the wall restored it to normal operation.

I plotted how the percentage of THD+noise changed with frequency at a level, 12.65V, equivalent to 20W into 8 ohms, 40W into 4 ohms, and 80W into 2 ohms, where I should be looking at actual distortion rather than noise. Even so, into 8 and 4 ohms there was only a slight rise above 2kHz, though it was greater into 2 ohms (fig.18). The

THD+N waveform (fig.19) suggested that the distortion was predominantly the benign second harmonic, which was confirmed by spectral analysis (fig.20), with the second harmonic lying at -80dB (0.01%) at high powers. Intermodulation distortion (fig.21) was also very low: the difference component at 1kHz resulting from an equal mix of 19 and 20kHz tones at a level a couple of dB below clipping into 4 ohms lay just above -90dB (0.003%).

The Mark Levinson No.585 offers impressive measured performance. I am not surprised that Larry Greenhill liked it as much as he did. —John Atkinson

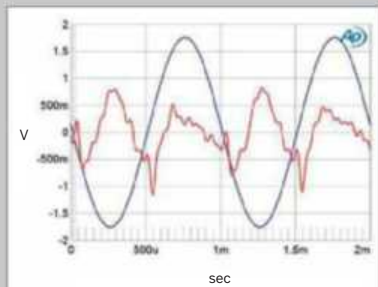


Fig.19 Mark Levinson No.585, 1kHz waveform at 50W into 8 ohms, 0.0062% THD+N (top); distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).

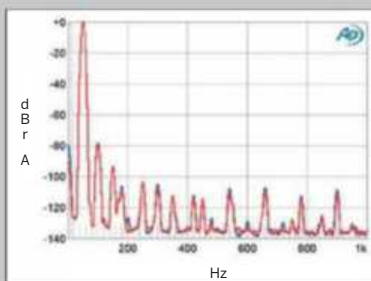


Fig.20 Mark Levinson No.585, spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC-1kHz, at 100W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

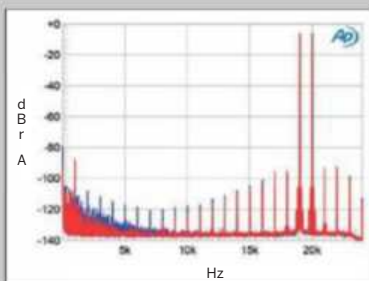


Fig.21 Mark Levinson No.585, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-24kHz, 19+20kHz at 200W peak into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).

JERRY RASKIN'S NEEDLEDOCTOR

Established 1979

WWW.NEEDLEDOCTOR.COM



PRO-JECT REFERENCE PHONO PARTNER

**NEW PRO-JECT DEBUT
CARBON DC TURNTABLE ▶**

*** LIMITED TIME SALE \$399.00**
REGULAR PRICE \$449

- ▶ INCLUDES ORTOFON 2M RED CARTRIDGE
- ▶ CARBON FIBER TONEARM
- ▶ AVAILABLE IN 7 COLORS



SWEET TUBE SOUND WITH AUDIOPHILE VERSATILITY!

PRO-JECT TUBE BOX S PHONO PREAMP (Available in Black or Silver) ▶

ONLY \$449.00

Carefully selected audiophile-grade components make it possible to enjoy your valuable vinyl collection like never before! The **PRO-JECT TUBE BOX S** has warmth, bass texture, and detail resolution that will breath life into your analog system.



Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

**WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION
OF TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES, AND NEEDLES!**

JOHN ATKINSON

Questyle Audio QP1R

HI-REZ PORTABLE PLAYER



The 2015 T.H.E. Show in Southern California clashed with my having to be in the office to ship our August issue to the printer, so I wasn't able to attend. But in devouring the online coverage on www.stereophile.com and its sister sites, on InnerFidelity.com I found a report by Tyll Hertsens about two new hi-rez portable players that made their debuts at T.H.E. Show: Questyle Audio Technology's QP1 (\$599) and QP1R (\$899).¹

Questyle was a name new to me. The company, based

in China, has its products manufactured by Foxconn, of iPhone fame, but its North American operation is headed up by Bruce Ball, a veteran of the high-end audio industry. The two new players are very similar, differing in internal storage capacity—the QP1 has 16GB, the QP1R 32GB—and, according to Questyle, the QP1R uses higher-quality components and different firmware, and offers lower distortion and superior sound quality.

¹ See www.innerfidelity.com/content/show-newport-2015-questyle-qp1-and-qp1r-digital-audio-players.

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Portable music player with 32GB internal memory and 2 microSD slots, each capable of accepting up to 128GB. Compatible file formats: FLAC ALAC, WAV, AIFF, AAC (unprotected), MP3. Compatible sample rates: up to 192kHz and DSD128. Compatible bit depths: 16–24. Outputs: headphone (3.5mm jack), line/TosLink (3.5mm dual jack). Frequen-

cy response: 20Hz–20kHz, ± 0.1 dB. THD+N: 0.0006%. Output impedance: 0.15 ohm. Maximum output level: 1.9V (High), 1V (Middle), 530mV (Low). Power supply: 3300mAh rechargeable lithium-polymer battery. Supplied accessories: micro-USB cable. Firmware: supplied with HW v.3 and SW v.0.07 Beta, updated toward end of review period to HW v.4 and production SW v.1.02.

Dimensions 5.25" (134mm) L by 2.4" (61mm) W by 0.6" (16mm) D. Weight: not specified.

Finishes Champagne Gold or Space Gray aluminum and Gorilla Glass.

Serial number of unit reviewed 10709500023.

Prices QP1R, \$899; QP1, \$599. Approximate number of dealers: 23, plus select online retailers.

Manufacturer Questyle

Audio Technology Co., Ltd., Suite 804, Building B, Jialin Highrise, No.2001, Shennan Road, Futian District, Shenzhen, China. Tel: (86) 755-82835670. Fax: (86) 755-82842083. US office: Questyle North America Inc., 7848 W. Sahara Avenue, Las Vegas, NV 89117. Tel: (702) 751-9978. Fax: (818) 697 9068. Web: www.questyleaudio.com.

oppo



Hear Every Jingle Bell.

OPPO Digital's PM-2 headphones are the perfect gift for music enthusiasts who are ready to upgrade their listening experience. An open-back design and seven-layer diaphragm pair perfectly with soft, pillowy earpads for a breathtaking listening experience.



The Planar Magnetic Present
PM-2 Planar Magnetic Headphones

\$699



A Perfect Stocking Stuffer
HA-2 Portable Headphone Amplifier & DAC

\$299

OPPO Digital, Inc. | www.oppodigital.com | Menlo Park, CA



@oppodigital

As much as I love the sound of the Pono Music PonoPlayer that I bought to replace the Astell&Kern AK100 on my daily commute, its Toblerone size and shape mean that it won't fit in my shirt pocket—and in New York City's summer swelter, I don't wear a jacket with a pocket into which I can slip it. The slim Questyle players looked tempting. I felt I should review the affordable QP1, but my baser instincts got the better of me—I asked for a sample of...

The QP1R

The size of a pack of cigarettes, the QP1R is housed in a CNC-machined aluminum chassis with a gray or a gold anodized finish. The front and rear panels are made from iPhone-esque Gorilla Glass, the front dominated by a square, color LCD screen and metal scroll wheel. This wheel has a central pushbutton and, around its circumference, four touchbuttons; a button on the QP1R's right edge acts as both the On/Off switch (long push) and disables/enables the control wheel, buttons, and the displays (short push).

The wheel's central button acts a Play/Pause control as well as a Select button, while the four other buttons—labeled Home, Return, Right, and Left—allow the settings menus and music library to be navigated in conjunction with the scroll wheel.

On the QP1R's top edge are two 3.5mm jacks. The left-hand jack is for headphones, the right-hand one for both analog (line level) and digital (optical S/PDIF) outputs. The line output can be set for fixed or variable level. To the right of the jacks is a conventional rotary volume control, protected by extensions of the aluminum frame. As supplied, there were two choices for maximum gain, High and Low,



Beneath the Gorilla Glass beats a heart of silicon.

Questyle claims a battery life of up to 10 hours.

but with the latest firmware (HW v.4 and SW v.1.02), released during the review period, there

are now three gain settings, to allow the player's output be optimized for specific headphones. The output impedance is specified as 0.15 ohm, which means the QP1R should have no problem driving even low-impedance in-ear monitors. The latest firmware also implements two independent octave-band graphic equalizers. As these offer up to ± 6 dB of adjustment, activating each drops the overall volume by 6dB, to avoid digital clipping.

The player's base has a micro-USB port flanked by two slots, each of which will accept a microSD card of up to 128GB capacity, for a maximum storage of 288GB. Questyle recommends FAT32-formatted cards, but I had no problems with an exFAT-formatted 64GB card. The micro-USB port allows the QP1R's 3300mAh lithium-polymer battery to be charged by a host computer (no AC adapter is supplied). Charging is said to take eight hours from a USB port.

The QP1R supports the regular PCM file formats—ALAC, APE, FLAC, AIFF, WAV, WMA Lossless—up to 24 bits and 192kHz. It also supports both DSD64 and DSD128 files, in DFF and DSF formats. The DAC chip is a Cirrus Logic CS4398, which features a combined multibit delta-sigma architecture operating up to 192kHz. The CS4398 handles DSD data natively, according to its datasheet, and is the same chip used in Astell&Kern's well-regarded AK240

MEASUREMENTS

I measured the Questyle Audio QP1R with my Audio Precision SYS2722 system (see the January 2008 "As We See It," <http://tinyurl.com/4ffpve4>). Source materials were WAV and AIFF test-tone files, as well as DSD64 and DSD128 files of test tones prepared for me by Malcolm Hawksford. The QP1R's battery was fully charged at the start of the testing,

and the player's firmware at the time of testing was the original combination of HW v.3.0 and SW v.0.07 Beta. The Line output was set to Fixed, and I looked at the QP1R's performance via both its Line and Headphone outputs.

The volume control operated in accurate 0.5dB steps, with the maximum volume indicated as "60." The maximum output level at 1kHz from the Line output was 1.68V with both PCM and DSD data, and the analog output was in the correct, non-inverted polarity, sourced from a constant 44 ohms across the audioband. By contrast, the Headphone output inverted signal polarity and featured a much lower source impedance: approximately 1 ohm including the cables, which will be appropriate for use with low-impedance headphones. With the Gain set to High, the maximum level at 1kHz from the Headphone output was 1.99V, decreasing to 996mV with it set to

Low. (With the latest firmware, the Low gain setting becomes Middle and the new Low gain setting has a maximum output level of 530mV.)

Even into a benign load of 100k ohms, the maximum level was lower from both outputs at low frequencies than it was at 1kHz. With a full-scale 20Hz tone and the volume control set to its maximum, the player emitted a mechanical clicking sound. Reducing the volume to "55" (ie, -2.5dB) eliminated the noise.

In its promotional material, Questyle refers to its digital reconstruction filter as being an Infinite Impulse Response (IIR) type, with all the ringing in its impulse response occurring after the impulse. To test a digital product's impulse response, I created a 44.1kHz WAV file with a single sample at the maximum level and all other samples at digital zero. Fig.1 shows the QP1R's behavior with this file, taken from the headphone output. As expected, the

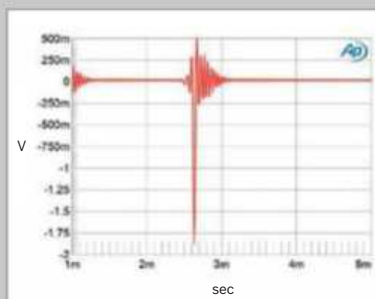


Fig.1 Questyle QP1R, impulse response at 44.1kHz (4ms time window).

IN A CLASS BY ITSELF

Revel Concerta2 loudspeakers combine elegant, sophisticated, modern design with the acoustical research and technical advances for which Revel is revered. Discover Affordable, High-End sound with the Concerta2 series.

Learn more at revelspeakers.com

CONCERTA²



Learn more at revelspeakers.com

 **REVEL**
by HARMAN

©2015 HARMAN International Industries, Incorporated. All rights reserved. Revel is a registered trademark of HARMAN International Industries, Incorporated, registered in the United States and/or other countries. Concerta2 is a registered trademark of HARMAN International Industries, Incorporated. Features, specifications and appearance are subject to change without notice.

portable media player.²

Questyle says that the QP1R has three voltage-stabilized power stages, and that its headphone amplifier features a patented current-mode topology with discrete devices biased into class-A. (The player did get warm after playing continually for an hour or so.) Operating in current mode is said to offer low noise and very wide closed-loop bandwidth, even after the application of negative feedback. Having learned my electrical engineering in The Age of Tubes, which are voltage-mode devices, I have never been able to get my head around current-mode circuits, so I will have to take Questyle's claims on trust. It's what it sounds like that matters.

Use

Loading both the QP1R's internal memory and the microSD cards is a simple matter of connecting the player to a host computer and drag'n'dropping the audio files onto the respective desktop icons. When the icons are ejected in the usual manner and the USB connection is broken, the player automatically scans its storage and rebuilds its music library. (There is also a manual option for doing this.)

Questyle claims a battery life of up to 10 hours, which seemed about right. The QP1R has a tactile feedback feature that I found invaluable: Whenever one of its buttons is pushed, the player vibrates briefly. However, I had some problems with both the scroll wheel and the touchbuttons. Using the QP1R in the office, with it lying on the desk next to my keyboard, the wheel and buttons would respond only intermittently. I found I had to hold the player to get consistent operation. But I loved the multilevel Return button, which got me quickly back to the Now Playing screen after I'd been adjusting, say, the equalizer settings.

Listening

I found the QP1R's graphic equalizer useful with the AudioQuest NightHawk headphones, which Herb Reichert reviews in this issue's "Gramophone Dreams" column. To sound neutral, these 'phones benefited from a slight, +2dB boost at 8Hz and above, and an equally slight cut at 62Hz and below. My Audeze LCD-X and Ultimate Ears 18 Pro headphones were okay with the Questyle's equalizer disabled, however. The following comments are an amalgam of my experience with all three headphones.

Consistent throughout my auditioning of the QP1R was

I found the QP1R's graphic equalizer useful with the AudioQuest NightHawk headphones.

a sense of ease to the sound, coupled with clarity. I never got the feeling that recorded detail was being unnaturally spotlighted, but I could hear deep into recordings. Alto saxophonist Paul Desmond's clam in the second verse of "Blue Rondo à la Turk," from the Dave Brubeck Quartet's *Time Out* (DSD64 file, CBS Legacy/Acoustic Sounds), was more audible than I'm used to—I have never understood why this take was used for the master, given this problem, nor have I read anyone commenting on it. Similarly, there's a clumsy high-register trill on the concertino trumpet in the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto 2, performed a whole step lower than concert pitch by the Academy of Ancient Music, directed from the harpsichord by Richard Egarr (24/88.2

² See www.stereophile.com/content/astellkern-ak240-portable-media-player.

measurements, continued

impulse is inverted, and almost all the ringing does occur after the event, as is typical of a minimum-phase filter.

The red and magenta traces in fig.2 reveal that this filter rolls off the output very rapidly above half the sample rate (vertical green line), with maximum attenuation reached at 24kHz. The aliased image at 25kHz of a full-scale 19.1kHz tone is therefore suppressed

by 115dB (blue and cyan traces). Note also the very low level of distortion harmonics in this graph. Fig.3 shows a more conventional frequency-response graph, taken with data sampled at 44.1, 96, and 192kHz. (Although I have a test-tone WAV file sampled at 384kHz, I got a "Not Support The Format" message when I tried to play it with the QP1R, as expected from the

specifications.) The two channels' responses differed slightly but probably insignificantly above 10kHz, with the right channel (magenta, gray, and red traces) rolling off very slightly earlier than the left (cyan, green, blue). The overall response conforms to the same basic shape at all three sample rates, with a sharp rolloff just below half the rate at 44.1 and 96kHz.

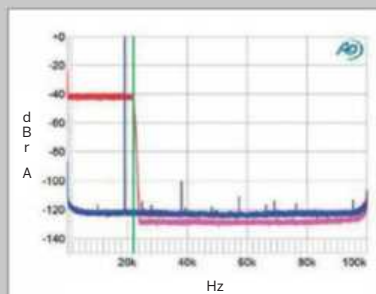


Fig.2 Questyle QP1R, wideband spectrum of white noise at -4dBFS (left channel red, right magenta) and 19.1kHz tone at 0dBFS (left blue, right cyan), with data sampled at 44.1kHz (20dB/vertical div.).

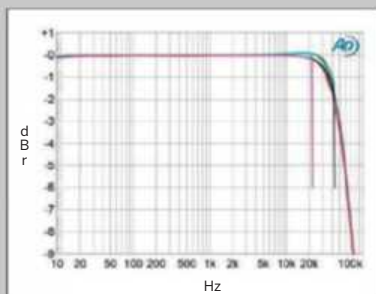


Fig.3 Questyle QP1R, frequency response at -12dBFS into 100k ohms with data sampled at: 44.1kHz (left channel blue, right red), 96kHz (left green, right gray), 192kHz (left cyan, right magenta) (1dB/vertical div.).

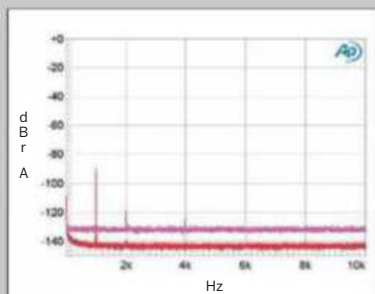
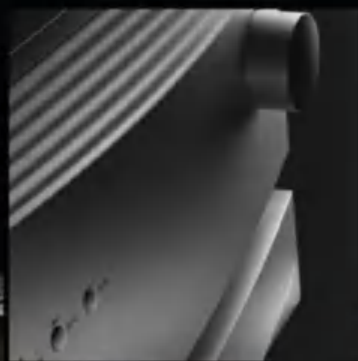


Fig.4 Questyle QP1R, spectrum with noise and spurs of dithered 1kHz tone at -90dBFS with: 16-bit data (left channel cyan, right magenta), 24-bit data (left blue, right red) (20dB/vertical div.).

OVER A CENTURY OF COLLECTIVE GENIUS IN HIGH END PERFORMANCE



We Saved The Best For Last.

December 5, 2015 | 1PM - 6PM

Witness the official debut of the highly anticipated **dCS Rossini** delivered by this year's industry sweetheart, **Wilson Audio Sabrina**. Enjoy an exclusive introduction of **Spectral's** stunning new **DMC-30SV** coupled with extraordinary dCS electronics and Wilson Audio speakers. Meet John Quick of dCS and Peter McGrath of Wilson Audio as they host a spectacular musical journey at Music Lovers Audio's Berkeley location. Refreshments will be served.

RSVP: info@musicloversaudio.com or 510-558-1000



audio · video · design

Music Lovers

2116 Blake Street Berkeley, CA 94704

@musicloversav



ALAC file from Harmonia Mundi HMU 807461.62). This had been one of my 2010 “Records to Die For,” but I hadn’t been aware of the problem with the trill until I listened to it with the Questyle player driving the Ultimate Ears in-ear monitors. Now, of course, I hear it all the time, no matter what gear I’m using.

The QP1R dug deep into recorded acoustics. My favorite set of the complete Beethoven Violin Sonatas is by Augustin Dumay accompanied by Maria João Pires, which we made our “Recording of the Month” for February 2003. In the Sonata 10 in G, Op.96 (ALAC rip from CD, Deutsche Grammophon 471 495-2), Dumay’s violin sounds as if recorded in a smaller, drier hall than was Pires’s piano. By contrast, playing the performance of this sonata by violinist David Abel and pianist Julie Steinberg (24/192k needle drop from Wilson Audio W-8315), our “Recording of the Month” for February 1984, through the Questyle revealed that while Abel and Steinberg were closer to the mikes, both instruments were clearly being played and recorded in the same space. But with both recordings, the QP1R got the tonalities of the instruments correct.

Catching the PBS broadcast of Simon and Garfunkel’s Concert in Central Park, from 1981, during Pledge Week reminded me that it had been a while since I’d played Paul Simon’s 2012 album, *Live in New York City* (16/44.1 ALAC files ripped from CD, Hear Music). This is possibly the best live band Simon ever put together, with guitarist/saxophonist Mark Stewart acting as music director and the extraordinary multi-instrumentalist Jim Oblon on drums. And while the late Phil Ramone couldn’t resist the pressure to mix this album *loud*, listening to bass guitarist Bakithi Kumalo reprising his part in “Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes” with



For comparisons, JA drove the Aurender Flow from the QP1R’s digital output.

With the Questyle, this was as good as headphone listening can get.

the Questyle driving the Audeze headphones was as good as it gets. The bass had the right combination of articulation and weight to its sound.

The song premiered, of course, on *Graceland*, and in 2012 I’d bought the 25th-anniversary reissue (24/96 ALAC file, Warner Bros./HDtracks). In general, I was disappointed at how this classic album, too, had fallen victim to the Loudness Wars. Given that the people who would buy this edition would be old farts like me, who loved the original’s openness of sound and lack of overall compression, why was it felt necessary to reduce its dynamic range for the reissue? But an unexpected bonus on this edition was the demo version of “Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes,” with Kumalo’s virtuosic bass line front and center under the voices in the deconstructed mix. Again, with the Questyle, this was as good as headphone listening can get.

But as impressed as I was with the QP1R, it was time

measurements, continued

Channel separation at 1kHz was excellent, at >105dB in both directions, but at 20Hz decreased to 80dB R-L and 90dB L-R, presumably due to increasing power-supply impedance at low frequencies. Fed dithered data representing a 1kHz tone at -90dBFS with first 16-bit data (fig.4, cyan and magenta traces), then 24-bit data (blue, red), the increase in bit depth dropped the noise floor by 13dB or so,

suggesting resolution of at least 18 bits. Peculiarly, the 16-bit trace has slight peaks at 2 and 4kHz that are absent from the 24-bit traces, and the player’s reproduction of a dithered 24-bit tone at -120dBFS also features a regular series of harmonics (fig.5). While this behavior should have no audible consequences, there appears to be something not quite right with how the QP1R handles very low-level data. Even so,

while a small amount of DC offset can be seen, the QP1R handled undithered PCM data at exactly -90.31dBFS in textbook fashion (fig.6), with the three DC voltage levels described by the data well differentiated.

Fig.7 shows a spectral analysis of the Questyle’s output while decoding a full-scale 50Hz tone. The volume control was at its maximum, and when I looked at the oscilloscope screen,

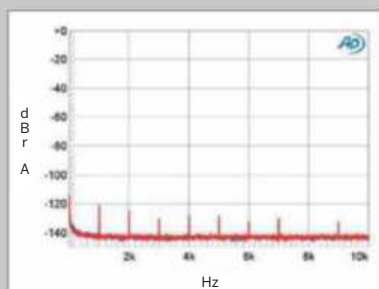


Fig.5 Questyle QP1R, spectrum with noise and spurs of dithered 1kHz tone at -120dBFS with 24-bit data (left channel blue, right red) (20dB/vertical div.).

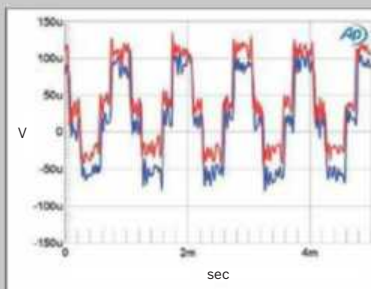


Fig.6 Questyle QP1R, waveform of undithered 1kHz sine wave at -90.31dBFS, 16-bit data (left channel blue, right red).

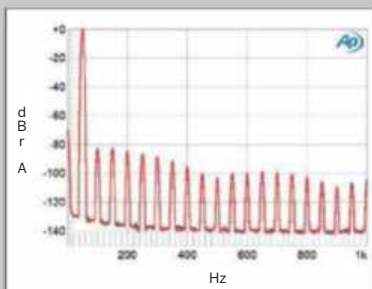


Fig.7 Questyle QP1R, volume control at “60,” spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC-1kHz, at 0dBFS into 100k ohms (left channel blue, right red; linear frequency scale).

"If you could significantly improve the sound of your audio system for under \$30, would you do it?"

SOME AUDIOPHILES BELIEVE that acquiring a particular audio component will move their system to a much higher level of performance. But should that be the next step?

The reason I ask

Hello. My name is Jim Smith. You may know me from a few years ago when I imported Avantgarde Acoustic loudspeakers, as well as Audiopax and Zanden. And you may have read my booklet, *31 Secrets to Better Sound*. Over 15,000 audiophiles received it. Hundreds wrote or called to thank me for the big improvement in their systems.

During that time, I visited numerous audiophiles and listened to their systems. In all of those visits, I never encountered *one system* that was performing anywhere near its potential! I know that there must be some, but I certainly never encountered any.

Is it OK to tell the truth?

Few of those systems were performing at even *half* of the performance of which they were capable! And yet, the common denominator among their owners was the question, "What about upgrading to the (current rave) XYZ component?" Clearly, they thought that buying a new component—amplifier, CD player, etc.—was the path to audio nirvana.

But their priorities were misplaced. There was no need to spend another dime on components until they had gotten their system optimized to be able to "play the room."

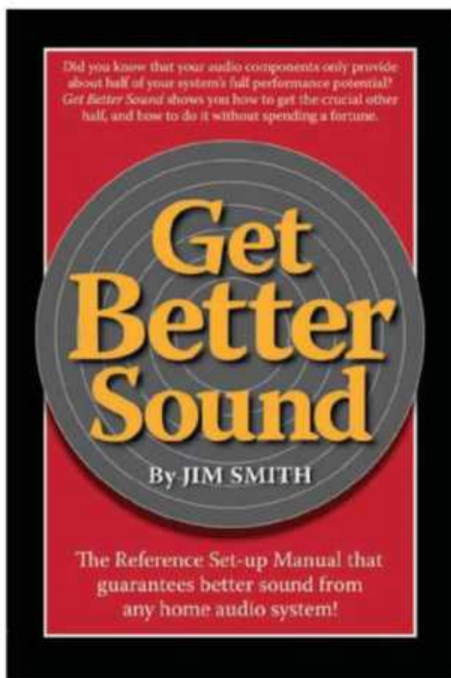
Throwing money out of the window

Let's face it. Buying a new component without getting the performance that you ought to get from it is about the same as throwing money out of the window!

Most of the press reviews have commented very favorably on this aspect (actual *rewards* from an investment) that comes with your purchase of *Get Better Sound*. The reviewers get it, and so can you!

"...Jim's book is one monster shortcut for the rest of us...if we're serious about this business of better sound..."

—Srajan Ebaen, Publisher, *6moons.com*



"Get Better Sound is the cheapest good tweak you can buy for your system. True—and I'm not bashful about saying it. It also has the potential to be among the best system investments you can make, period..."

—Art Dudley, *Stereophile*

Disagree slightly

I really appreciate Srajan's recent comments about *Get Better Sound*. However, I think of the manual not so much as a *shortcut*, but as a crucial—and highly affordable—*next step* to get better sound from any system.

My goal is to show you how to greatly improve your sound, and how to do it without spending a fortune. Plus, when you do make a purchase, you'll be confident that you've selected the very best component. The *202 tips* in the *GBS* manual have provided the highest levels of performance in audio systems around the world—in systems just like yours.

No more secrets

Now you can use the same techniques that I used to win those "Best Sound of Show" press comments and to receive continuing acclaim from my personal clients for over 35 years.

For much more information, including how to order your copy of *Get Better Sound*, visit www.getbetersound.com. E-mail me

at jim@getbetersound.com, or call me at 770-777-2095.

Best regards,

Jim Smith

For info on more *Get Better Sound* services, visit www.getbetersound.com

Get Better Sound: Reference Set-up Manual, DVD, Quarter Notes, StraightTalk, RoomPlay™ Custom Voicing

Internet: www.getbetersound.com • Phone: 770-777-2095 • E-mail: jim@getbetersound.com

to hear how it stacked up against the other portable hi-rez products I've reviewed.

Against the Aurender Flow

Last June, when I reviewed the Flow D/A headphone amplifier (\$1295),³ I liked its sound a lot, but felt that its light tonal balance would be a better match with relatively dark-sounding headphones like the Audeze LCD-Xes than with headphones, such as Sennheiser's HD-800, that have a similar character in the treble. As the Flow has a TosLink input, it would be easy to compare it with the QP1R, using an optical cable to drive the Flow from the latter's optical S/PDIF output and switching the LCD-X headphones from the player to the DAC.

Or so I thought. It turned out that the Questyle's Line and Headphone outputs can't be operated in parallel—inserting the TosLink cable in the Line Output mutes the QP1R's Headphone output. The first 1/4"-to-3.5mm adapter cable I tried to use with the Audezes was fouled by the flange around the Questyle's output jack, meaning it played in mono unless I held it in place—and every time I unplugged the headphones from the Flow, the latter's volume was reset to "0."

But once I'd worked out how to overcome those operational difficulties, I *could* compare the two, matching the levels by ear. Using the 24/176.4k AIFF file of David Abel and Julie Steinberg's recording of Brahms's Violin Sonata 1 (Wilson Audiophile)—I was pleased to find that the QP1R's TosLink output *did* operate at this sample rate—the Questyle's and Aurender's treble balances sounded very similar. The piano's low frequencies had slightly less weight through the QP1R, a touch more authority through the Flow. This was with the LCD-X headphones.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Digital Sources Astell&Kern AK100, Pono Music Pono-Player portable players.

Headphone Amplifiers Aurender Flow, Meridian Prime.

Headphones Audeze LCD-X, AudioQuest NightHawk, Ultimate Ears 18 Pro.—John Atkinson

Through the AudioQuest NightHawk headphones, the Aurender's low-frequency weight with "Heart Is a Drum," from Beck's *Morning Phase* (24/96 ALAC file, Capitol/HDRtracks), became too much of a good thing. Even with the EQ bypassed, the Questyle's lighter lows allowed me to hear a bit deeper into the mix with this bass-heavy track, although, paradoxically, I ended up preferring "Lose Yourself to Dance," from Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories* (24/88.2 ALAC file, Columbia/HDRtracks), through the Flow, which had a tad more midrange presence.

Against the Astell&Kern AK100

The first high-end portable player I reviewed was the Astell&Kern AK100 (\$699), which I wrote about in August 2013⁴ and subsequently purchased. Through the Audeze LCD-X headphones, Beck's "Heart Is a Drum" sounded lighter in weight with the A&K than with the Questyle. This may well be due to the first-generation AK100 having a higher source impedance, though this character added to the player's sense of low-frequency articulation. More

CONTINUED ON PAGE 173

3 See www.stereophile.com/content/aurender-flow-da-headphone-amplifier.

4 See www.stereophile.com/content/astellampkern-ak100-portable-media-player.

measurements, continued

the top halves of the waveform were beginning to clip, which is why a picket fence of low-level distortion harmonics can be seen. Reducing the volume by 2.5dB eliminated the clipping, and now only some odd-order harmonics are visible (fig.8), with the third the highest in level at -104dB (0.0006%). The distortion was even lower with DSD64 data (not shown). Intermodulation distortion was also extremely low,

even with the volume control set to its maximum (fig.9).

The Miller-Dunn J-Test signal is not diagnostic for systems in which the bit clock is not embedded in the data. Nevertheless, I routinely include it in my tests of digital products, and with 16-bit data the QP1R performed very well: All the odd-order harmonics of the low-frequency, LSB-level square-wave were reproduced at the correct

level, as indicated by the green line in fig.10. With 24-bit data, nothing could be seen above the noise floor, other than the central spike at one-quarter the sample rate (not shown).

Other than its slightly idiosyncratic handling of very low-level signals, the Questyle QP1R's measured performance was excellent.—John Atkinson

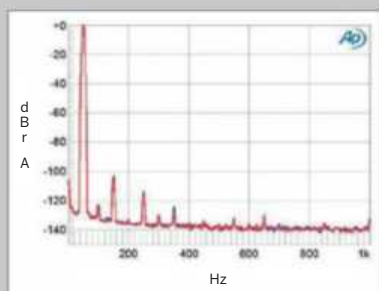


Fig.8 Questyle QP1R, volume control at "55," spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC-1kHz, at 0dBFS into 100k ohms (left channel blue, right red; linear frequency scale).

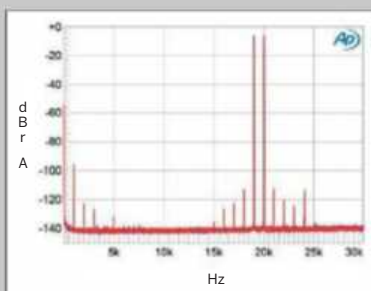


Fig.9 Questyle QP1R, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-30kHz, 19+20kHz at 0dBFS into 100k ohms, 44.1kHz data (left channel blue, right red; linear frequency scale).

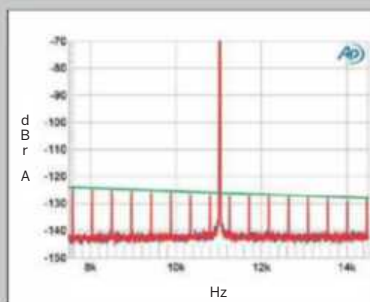


Fig.10 Questyle QP1R, high-resolution jitter spectrum of analog output signal, 11.025kHz at -6dBFS, sampled at 44.1kHz with LSB toggled at 229Hz: 16-bit data (left channel blue, right red). Center frequency of trace, 11.025kHz; frequency range, 43.5kHz.

JERRY RASKIN'S NEEDLEDOCTOR

Established 1979

WWW.NEEDLEDOCTOR.COM

HAND-BUILT IN THE USA

GRADO GOLD1 PRESTIGE SERIES PHONO CARTRIDGE ▶

ONLY \$260.00

"The **PRESTIGE GOLD**, however, seemed to be sweeter than most. It was lively and detailed but never edgy on vocal sibilants, and didn't over-emphasize leading edges on acoustic guitar. Gold? Smooth? Mellow Yellow!"

- Alan Sircom, *HI-FI CHOICE*



GRADO'S PRESTIGE SERIES CARTRIDGES



GRADO SILVER1
PRESTIGE SERIES
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$225

GRADO RED1
PRESTIGE SERIES
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$170

GRADO BLUE1
PRESTIGE SERIES
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$125

GRADO GREEN1
PRESTIGE SERIES
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$95

GRADO BLACK1
PRESTIGE SERIES
PHONO CARTRIDGE
\$75



Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

**WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION
OF TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES, AND NEEDLES!**

FOLLOW-UP

BY ROBERT DEUTSCH & ART DUDLEY

THIS ISSUE: In production for 30 years, the CAT SL-1 preamplifier gets an upgrade, and the Lenco-based PTP turntable is improved.



CONVERGENT AUDIO TECHNOLOGY SL1 RENAISSANCE BLACK PATH EDITION PREAMPLIFIER

Known simply as “the CAT,” Convergent Audio Technology’s SL1 tubed preamplifier first appeared in 1985, and ever since has been the subject of almost continuous improvement.¹ According to Ken Stevens, founder and chief designer of Convergent Audio Technology, some of those improvements—use of a specific wire, tweaking the value of a certain resistor, a minor change in wiring layout, etc.—used to be incorporated into production with no change in model name, and with little or no increase in retail price. When enough such changes had accumulated and/or have amounted to significant cost, a new model was designated—Reference, Reference Mk.II, Signature, Signature Mk. II, etc.—and the price increased. Whenever possible, CAT made available upgrades of earlier models, but sometimes the changes were so extensive that upgrading isn’t cost-effective—*ie*, the upgrade would cost almost as much as a new SL1. Nonetheless, earlier versions of the SL1 are much in demand on the used market.

This policy changed with the SL1 Renaissance, which I reviewed in the November 2009 issue,² was itself the result of upgrades that couldn’t easily be applied to earlier units. Those changes were extensive, including new circuit-board material and layout; an improvement in the power supply; switch-selectable gain; an A/V Bypass; and an optional built-in moving-coil transformer. As I said in my review, while the Renaissance’s predecessor, the SL1 Ultimate, was an excellent preamp, the Renaissance was comfortably ahead of it in every musically relevant parameter. I then posed the somewhat rhetorical question: “Has every aspect of the design and its execution been tweaked to the point at which no further improvement is possible?” My not-so-rhetorical answer: “For now, the answer has to be ‘Yes.’ As for the future—well, knowing Ken Stevens, I wouldn’t bet on it.”

Six years later, I’m glad I didn’t.

What’s New, pussycat?

The SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition is named for CAT’s new Black Path capacitor, which is used in the most critical positions in the preamp. As Ken Stevens tells the story, every three or four years, CAT holds a “capacitor shoot-out” (see

sidebar on p.147). In previous shoot-outs, the CAT cap, designed in 1990 by Stevens, emerged unscathed. However, at the last shoot-out, one of the other capacitors had a more natural-sounding midrange, and another had better low-level resolution. But both had shortcomings in other areas, so Stevens designed a new cap: the Black Path. According to Brian Wasserman, who handles customer relations for CAT, “the Black Path capacitor utilizes a film with a highly convoluted arrangement of the long-chain molecules. This greatly slows down the absorption rate of fast moving signals (*ie*, those at 2Hz or above) and then slows down the re-release of energy back into the signal.”

Whenever possible, CAT makes available upgrades of earlier models.

While designing the Black Path capacitor, Stevens and his crew were also working on the new “baby CAT” power amplifier, the JL5. The process resulted in many new findings regarding power-supply design, audio-circuit optimization, and ultimately, reduction of noise intermodulation. According to Stevens, all of these enhancements, which are now incorporated into the SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition, are cumulatively more significant than the Black Path cap itself.

The SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition costs \$11,990 with phono stage, \$9990 without. The price of the Renaissance with phono had held steady at \$9995 for eight years, so the increase just about covers inflation. An SL1 Renaissance with phono can be upgraded to Black Path status for \$4000 (the upgrade for the line-only version is \$2500). Earlier versions can’t be upgraded.

OPTIONS: The Black Path Edition can also be had with some interesting options—above and beyond the upgrades described above, in both scope and cost—that were unavailable in earlier SL1s. Like all previous versions, the Black Path is a single-ended design, but Ken Stevens has

1 Convergent Audio Technology, 85 High Tech Drive, Rush, NY 14543. Tel: (585) 359-2700. E-mail: catamps@aol.com.

2 See www.stereophile.com/tubepreamps/convergent_audio_technology_sl1_renaissance_preamplifier/.

FURUTECH
Pure Transmission



GTX-D



Furutech FPX series – Rhodium, Gold or Copper – featuring unique pin insert construction ensures increased contact areas, stable transmission and the tightest contacts in the Audio industry!

Furutech GTX series

intense engineering scrutiny has resulted in an industry-first, a technique allowing us to use special Furutech 24k gold- or rhodium-plated α (Alpha) pure copper conductors strengthened and sprung by our innovative nonmagnetic Stainless Steel Conductor Spring System that keeps a firm grip yet won't damage male connector blades or their plated surfaces. The GTX receptacle can be summed up in a word; virtuoso!

Cable Company , Colossal Cables , Hi-Fi One , LE Designs

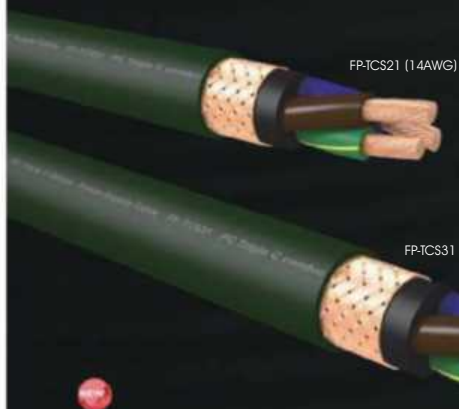
WWW.FURUTECH.COM

Elite

Audio Video Distribution

California (800)457-2577x22 (323)466-9694x24
info@eliteavdist.com
www.eliteavdist.com

FURUTECH
Pure Transmission



FP-ICS21 (14AWG)

FP-ICS31 (12AWG)

Nano-OFC Power cable

The secret to Furutech's world renowned Nano-OFC conductors is Furutech's extremely effective signal transmission enhancer that is incorporated into the cable strands literally as they are produced. Nano Liquid's Silver and Gold particles are so tiny (8 nano-meters in diameter (8/1000000mm)) they cover the Alpha-OFC surface and "fill up" any tiny cracks and imperfections left on the conductor surface during the production process, increasing the electrical conduction area and drastically lowering the characteristic impedance of the cable. Addictively realistic body, weight, and dimension are added to all signals in a realistic, natural, and dynamically expressive manner.

FP-S022N (14AWG)

FP-S032N (12AWG)

Alpha-PC Triple C Power cable

Furutech's NEW α (Alpha) PC-Triple C Power cable utilizes an ingenious proprietary forging process where variable high pressures are applied to high-purity oxygen-free copper tens of thousands of times, ultimately transforming the copper's crystal grain boundaries that were formerly in a vertical direction into a longitudinal orientation to allow the signal to flow more easily down the manufactured cable. The copper's crystals become much more well-connected and uniform, both physically and electrically, creating a much more highly conductive and sonically compelling conductor.

Available from The Cable Company

WWW.FURUTECH.COM

Elite

Audio Video Distribution

California (800)457-2577x22 (323)466-9694x24
info@eliteavdist.com
www.eliteavdist.com

endeavored to make it work well with balanced source components and amplifiers. In the past, this involved plug-in adapters, but now XLR inputs are available at no extra charge. According to Ken Stevens, when the negative leg of a source component's balanced output is generated by an op-amp—which he suggests is usually the case—that portion of the signal is best ignored, as it will be by CAT's newly available pseudo-balanced XLR inputs. The Black Path Edition is also available with true balanced outputs, the negative legs of which are derived from the signal by transformers described by Stevens as excellent—but pricey: This \$2000 option, not included in my sample, is recommended for use with balanced amplifiers of low common-mode rejection ratio, which produce less power and more distortion if they aren't provided an antiphase signal.

A second option addresses a long-standing request from SL1 owners—and a long-standing criticism from reviewers: The 23-step volume control used in all previous SL1s was limited, in the middle of its range, to steps of 2.5–3.0dB. This sometimes led to a situation where the desired playback level was unattainable, existing as it did *between* two selectable levels. CAT's optional 46-step volume control is most welcome, providing increments about half the size of the standard control. At \$1000 it's fairly expensive, but it's a high-quality component, its installation is labor-intensive, and Stevens claims that it sounds better. It was installed in the upgrade of my Renaissance to the Black Path Edition, and I found the finer volume gradation very useful.

LISTENING: It's only logical: The better an audio component, the less room for improvement. The CAT SL1 Renaissance was already an excellent preamp, so when Ken Stevens told me that an upgrade was available, I assumed that any sonic improvement would likely be modest.

I was wrong. Within a few minutes of listening to my SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition, I knew I was hearing no minor improvement—an impression that solidified as the preamp continued to warm up and break in. My original plan had been to discuss the upgrade in a short sidebar to a review of a different product; having now heard the improvements, I felt they deserved a separate Follow-Up. Except as noted below, I played CDs through PS Audio's PerfectWave

The SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition is named for CAT's new Black Path capacitor.

MemoryPlayer transport and PerfectWave DirectStream DAC. The speakers were Avantgarde Acoustic Uno Nanos, driven by a McIntosh MC275LE amplifier. All cables were Nordost Valhalla 2.

In my review of the PS Audio DirectStream DAC in the February 2015 issue,³ I compared driving the McIntosh MC275LE directly from the DirectStream's analog outputs *vs* through the CAT SL1 Renaissance, at matched levels. The DirectStream's operating system was the then-current v.1.2.1. My preference was for the signal played through the SL1 Renaissance—but, as I noted in the review, it was a close call: I had to switch back and forth at least a half-dozen times before I was

confident in my conclusion.

I made the same comparison with the Black Path Edition (the DirectStream itself having been upgraded to the latest—and sonically superior—Yale OS). This time there was no contest: Through the Black Path, music was simply more open, with more clearly defined soundstages and a more dynamic presentation. Nor did I have to do much switching back and forth to arrive at this conclusion—the differences were immediately apparent.

I had already listened a couple of times to Eugene Istomin's recording of Mozart's Piano Concerto 21, with Gerard Schwarz conducting the Seattle Symphony Orchestra (CD, Reference RR-68CD), and while I thought its sound was excellent, the interpretation seemed a bit bland and lacking in energy. Listening to it through the Black Path Edition, I noticed a lot

³ See www.stereophile.com/content/ps-audio-perfectwave-directstream-da-processor-robert-deutsch-february-2015.

CAT'S CAPACITOR SHOOT-OUTS

A capacitor shoot-out is a method for selecting capacitors that have the potential to produce the best sound. It does not involve measurements—Convergent Audio Technology's Ken Stevens has found that measurements of capacitors taken with even the most advanced laboratory instruments reveal very low correlation with sound quality. On the other hand, such factors as termination technique, film tension, core construction, and wrap style—all of which have virtually no effect on traditional capacitor measurements—may profoundly affect the sound. The only way to tell how good a capacitor will sound in a circuit is to listen to it.

Stevens is adamant in not regarding these tests as “subjective”; he considers them to be objective, in that they're “repeatable with trained listeners with access to a credible system and familiar with the sound of instruments and human voices.” Typically, CAT's capacitor shoot-outs involve Stevens and two other listeners, who reportedly find themselves in almost consistent agreement about the sonic characteristics of the capacitors tested—if not necessarily their *preferences*, which Stevens considers to be more subjective.

The procedure involves inserting various makes of capacitors, all of the same nominal value in microfarads/

picofarads, in a part of the circuit that is highly sensitive to capacitor performance, such as the interstage position in a preamplifier's line stage. They then listen to highly familiar recordings, selected on the basis of their ability to reveal differences. In the last capacitor shoot-out, the first recording was Diana Krall's *Live in Paris* (CD, Verve). According to Stevens, they listened for the overall “feel” of the performance as well as for specific details, such as the naturalness of Krall's voice and her working of the piano's pedals: “With really bad capacitors, including some of the expensive audiophile brands, the pedals just become a low-frequency disturbance of unknown origin.” That first test eliminated many capacitors from contention. The three listeners then played additional recordings, to focus on specific sonic characteristics such as timbre and macrodynamics. Sometimes, using IC pins on the board, they plugged in and removed caps without turning off the system.

The same sort of listening tests are used to select other component parts of CAT products, including various support feet. The squishy feet used for the SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition are the best CAT has found so far, but they're always on the lookout for something better. —Robert Deutsch



The Ultimate Music Source For People Serious About Music

At HDtracks, we know that listening to music is much more than hitting a play button. It's about pushing your hardware to the limit, charting new sonic territory, and creating the best possible listening experience.

That's why HDtracks is all about giving you the freedom to craft your own experience. We don't lock you into one file format, we let you choose from FLAC, AIFF, ALAC or WAV. We don't pick your sample rate for you, we give you the option of every sample rate we carry. We also don't hide your music inside of an app, we give you the files so you have control over when and where you listen.

Did we mention that HDtracks is the only online music store that painstakingly tests every hi-res album to ensure it meets our strict quality standards?

Get 15% Off Your First Order!
Use code: STEREOPHILE15HD*

HDtracks

Now offering DSD! Learn more at hdtracks.com/dsd

* Limit one order per customer. Only applies to digital downloads from HDtracks.com. Territory restrictions may apply.
Offer expires January 31, 2016 11:59 PM PST.

more in the way of subtle dynamic variation, with no lack of energy when that was called for, and with a most effective communication of the playful interplay between piano and orchestra. Admittedly, other variables were in play—my audio system had undergone some changes since the last time I'd listened to this recording—but when I bypassed the Black Path using the DirectStream's variable analog output, some of the subtle dynamic variations were obscured. The Black Path Edition had a special way with dynamics, revealing variations at both the subtle and extreme ends of the range.

A related factor, particularly evident in recordings of piano and of other percussion instruments, was the Black Path's rendering of intertransient silence. Percussive sounds generally seemed crisper—not sharper or exaggerated, but with less overhang of notes. Listening to *Dick Hyman Plays Fats Waller* (direct to CD, Reference RR-33DCD), I'd always been impressed with Hyman's technique; through the Black Path, his fingers seemed to fly even more effortlessly, or as if the action of his Bösendorfer 2905E reproducing piano had been tweaked for faster response. Quite remarkable.

Going through my audiophile checklist, all the important characteristics were improved: Soundstages were more clearly defined, with better focus on voices and instruments; tonal balances were as neutral as could be, with no warmth added or subtracted, or other departures from neutrality; trebles were extended but sweet; and bass was similarly extended and very natural in character. Noise, which can be a problem with tubed equipment,

The Black Path Edition is also available with true balanced outputs.

was simply absent in practical terms: With the volume control set to a normal listening level but without applying signal, I engaged and disengaged the Mute control and had to strain to hear any difference at all.

In my write-up of the SL1 Renaissance, I described it as having the much-desired combination of high transparency and high resolution. By *transparency* I mean a component's ability to get out of the way of the music, adding as little as possible of its own characteristic sound or coloration. By *resolution* I mean a component's ability to reveal the most minute recorded details. Although I didn't have a non-upgraded SL1 Renaissance on hand for an A/B comparison (and don't forget those other changes to my system), I'm comfortable in saying that the Black Path Edition further enhanced the SL1 Renaissance's transparency and resolution.

Ken Stevens is justifiably proud of the Black Path Edition's phono section ("Make sure you listen to some LPs," he told me). It was extremely quiet, and its switchable MC transformers and plug-in load resistors allow it to be optimized for use with a wide range of cartridges. In my 2009 review, I'd noted that the SL1 Renaissance's phono section was much quieter than that of the preceding model, the SL1 Ultimate. Not having the SL1 Renaissance and Black Path Edition available at the same time for a direct comparison, I'm

reluctant to say that the latter sounded "much better," but it certainly sounded as good. My phono source consists of an aging Linn LP12 turntable with Ittok VII tonearm, and a similarly aging AudioQuest AQ7000nsx cartridge—a combination that, while very listenable, falls well short of the state of the art. I'm in the middle of upgrading to a new turntable, arm, and cartridge, but that will be a story for another day. My experience with the Black Path Edition told me that it will be easy to set it up to match my new cartridge, and that the SL1 will not be a limiting factor in optimizing the sound quality.

CONCLUSIONS: Convergent Audio Technology's SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition is a preamplifier that can be described only with superlatives. It is simply a great preamp, and represents a major improvement on its predecessor, the SL1 Renaissance. But more than any of the specific component changes, such as the use of CAT's Black Path capacitor, the factor most responsible for the performance of the Black Path Edition is designer Ken Stevens's single-minded devotion to making his products the best they can be by selecting the best-sounding components and tweaking every aspect of the design for optimal sound quality.

Of course, a preamplifier is only one component of an audio system; at the risk of stating the self-evident, it can't, by itself, produce sound. *Every* component of an audio system is important, and the first link in the chain is the recording itself. But if everything else in the system is working right, the SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition will get you closer to the music's soul.

—Robert Deutsch ■

PTP AUDIO SOLID 12 TURNTABLE

The 1960s were my formative years—an accident of birth, I assure you—and to this day I spend a lot of my time listening to records made during that decade. I do so by playing them on a turntable made in the '60s. Through electronics containing vacuum tubes made in the '60s. Driving a pair of speakers made in the '60s.

Yet although I began buying records in the '60s, the vast majority of my favorites from that era weren't even on my radar at the time of their release—and wouldn't be for decades to come. And because no one in my extended family or circle of friends had any interest in hi-fi equipment, I turned a

deaf eye to those things, too. I didn't even see a Thorens turntable until I was 19, when I took a part-time job in a small-town hi-fi shop. Tubes were things I associated only with visits from the TV repairman (who was also the produce manager in the supermarket where my father worked).

So nostalgia has nothing to do

As much as I enjoyed the previous version of Peter Reinders's turntable, this one was even better.

with my appreciation for vintage and vintage-inspired gear: It's all about the sound—and, to a lesser extent, the looks—of such things as my late-'60s Altec Valencia speakers, and my *ca* 1961 Thorens TD 124 turntable. Notwithstanding my admiration for many contemporary audio products, that Thorens in particular does some things—momentum, force, and the ability to present sonic colors and textures as a single quality, as if the two were melded like dye in wool—in a way that today's gear utterly misses. I wish that all who love LP playback as much as I do could hear a Thorens TD 124 or Garrard 301 or EMT 930 in their systems, but those products



"I regret having waited so long to listen
to a Phase Technology loudspeaker..."
- Robert J. Reina, Stereophile

The Return of a Classic.



Pictured above: The original PC60 brochure from 1983.

Phase Technology has reissued the PC60 as the **PC60 CA** (classic audiophile) - engineered with the same philosophy that created the originals, yet updated with today's cutting edge technology.

A limited number of these speakers will be produced at the Phase Technology factory in Jacksonville, Florida-- the same factory that produced the original PC60.

Own a piece of audiophile history.

phasetech.com
913-663-5600

are subject to the vagaries of supply and demand: They are rare and pricey. What's worse, none was ever plug-and-play to begin with—the Thorens and Garrard require the user to provide and install a suitable plinth—and each requires painstaking maintenance and occasional repairs.

But, as noted by Peter Reinders, of PTP Audio,⁴ the design elements most associated with the uniquely good sounds of those vintage turntables—idler-wheel drive systems and high-torque motors—are abundant in the distinctly less-expensive 1960s turntables from the Swiss company Lenco AG, now defunct. In fact, vintage Lenco turntables are themselves abundant, which goes a long way toward explaining the whole affordability thing.

Working from his shop in the Netherlands, Reinders harvests from a seemingly endless supply of Lenco turntables their most essential parts—motors, motor pulleys, idler wheels, platter bearings, platters—reconditions them, then mates them with Corian plinths and stainless-steel top plates of his own design. Those top plates are especially important, as they contribute degrees of precision, rigidity, and isolation of platter from motor that the original Lencos lacked. The plates also figure in the name of Reinders's company, which began as a part-time, accessories-only business: PTP stands for Peter's Top Plates.

In my "Listening" column in the June 2013 issue,⁵ I wrote about PTP Audio's Solid 12 turntable, named for its outside plinth (21.75" wide by 17.75" deep), which can accommodate a 12" tonearm. (There's also a Solid 9, for use with tonearms of more conventional length.) The Solid 12 delivered the idler-drive goods and then some, providing excellent force, drive, and musical momentum, with a fine tonal balance and good if less-than-Garrard-301 levels of bass extension. I wrote that the Solid 12 was "as close to a plug-and-play idler-wheel turntable as you're likely to find," an observation that was itself as close to understatement as one is likely to find in an audio-review magazine.

Earlier this year, Reinders got in



The PTP Audio Solid 12 turntable.

Charles Moffett's drumming had a level of impact I'd never before heard from my system.

touch to describe two new refinements of the Solid 12—adjustable feet for the plinth and a proprietary platter bearing—and to see if I'd like to spend a few days with a recent production sample. A customer in the US volunteered to let his new Solid 12 take a detour to my home on the way to its final destination, and I made the most of his generosity.

While waiting for the Solid 12 to arrive, I researched PTP's new bearing and updated price list. In early 2013, the Solid 12 sold for €2450, tax included and shipping not.⁶ The new price is €2750 plus shipping, for a turntable configured like the one I reviewed in 2013, with an original Lenco platter bearing (cleaned and refitted, of course). Now, for an additional €250, you can have the PTP Solid Bearing, whose precision-machined, stainless-steel housing is fitted with self-lubricating bushings of sintered bronze and a thrust plate of polyoxymethylene (POM), a slick, hard polymer. The original Lenco spindle is retained, but now it rests on a ruby thrust ball of reportedly perfect sphericity. A small amount of low-viscosity oil completes the Solid Bearing, for which Reinders claims a much lower noise floor.

The new sample arrived. While unpacking it, I received an e-mail from Reinders reminding me that this latest version of the Solid 12 was equipped with an additional upgrade: a set of

support feet, made by the German firm SSC (www.hifi-ssc.de), for which PTP Audio charges an extra €150. Of the stock Solid 12 feet I remember only that there were three, and that they supported the plinth without actually being fastened to it; the new feet also come in threes, and also allow the plinth to perch on their top surfaces, which are covered with felt. But each new foot comprises two aluminum-alloy parts threaded together in a manner that allows the foot's height to be adjusted, and those parts are machined sufficiently well that I was able to adjust them even when they were supporting the turntable's considerable total weight of 55 lbs (of which I would guess that the plinth accounts for more than half).

A few words are due the Solid 12's interchangeable armboard: a circular slab of Corian, about 5.5" in diameter, that fastens to a cutout in the plinth by means of four machine screws. PTP makes boards for a variety of tonearms, including the Thomas Schick, which I and, apparently, hundreds of other PTP customers use. (Indeed, the soon-to-be owner of my review sample had ordered it for use with his own Schick arm: The correct mounting collet

4 PTP Audio, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Web: www.ptp.audio.com.

5 See www.stereophile.com/content/listening-126.

6 Peter Reinders estimates the cost of shipping a Solid 12 to the US as €175–€200.

The Difference is in the Design

Platinum Starlight 7's patented DNA Helix design channels more electromagnetic signal energy than others, providing industry-leading transmission speed and amazingly lifelike sound quality.



"The Platinum Starlight 7 has no peer in soundstage size, airiness, tempo tracking, dynamics, bass pitch, timbral realism, and lack of grain."

THE ABSOLUTE SOUND
MARCH 2015



WIREWORLD
CABLE TECHNOLOGY
Engineered for Reality™

Other cables filter your music.
Wireworld cables let the most music through.

Technology that channels musical expression.

www.wireworldcable.com

© 2015 Wireworld, Inc.

DNA Helix U.S. Patent #8,569,627





had even been bolted into place.) My tonearm slipped easily into place, and exhibited the precise spindle-to-pivot distance prescribed by Thomas Schick. With the plinth perched on its trio of felt-topped feet and the arm in place, my only other chores were to: remove two transit bolts that hold in place the spring-loaded motor suspension; remove a cable tie that secures the idler-wheel carrier; slip the aluminum-alloy platter onto the bearing spindle;

How many vintage-audio enthusiasts does it take to change a light bulb?

and plug a bog-standard AC cord (not included) into the IEC socket on the rear edge of the plinth. The cartridges I used were my own Denon DL-103 and a sample of the Tzar DST (review to come), both installed in the Schick's optional graphite headshell.

IDLER WILD: As I've come to expect from the best idler-drive turntables of the 1960s, the new PTP Solid 12 did a remarkably good job of communicating the touch and force of well-recorded instrumental music. What I *didn't* expect was the PTP-Schick combination surpassing, in that regard, my reference combo of Garrard 301 turntable and EMT 997 tonearm. Yet while the two players were close, and while there remained some records with which the 301 seemed to have the edge, others sounded punchier when played on the Solid 12. One such was a reissue of the Ornette Coleman Trio's *At the "Golden Circle" Stockholm, Volume One* (LP, Blue

Hidden beneath the platter of the PTP Audio Solid 12 are Peter's (two) Top Plates. Note red transit bolts and white damping tape on original idler-wheel carrier.

Note ST-84224): Everything on the record sounded vibrant and human and immediate, but when played on the Solid 12, Charles Moffett's drumming, especially in "Faces and Places," had a level of impact I'd never before heard from my system.

That Coleman album was, I think, the second or third LP I played on the new Solid 12. From that moment forward, there was no doubt in my mind: As much as I enjoyed the previous version of Peter Reinders's turntable, this one was even better—very apparently so.

Nor were the new Solid 12's talents limited to sheer force (not that there would have been anything wrong with that): It also rivaled my reference in its ability to preserve and present music's color, texture, and substance. For instance: At the beginning of the *Allegretto* of Beethoven's Symphony 7, from Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic's 1961–62 cycle of Beethoven's symphonies (8 LPs, Deutsche Grammophon/Speakers Corner 104301/8), the listener emerges from the introductory A-minor chord into a thick, darkly colored forest of cellos and double basses. In terms of scale and touch and, again, combined texture and color, the Solid 12 made more of this powerful moment than either my Garrard or my Thorens. Its sound was indeed *solid*—and huge, and almost uncannily textured—and, by dint of these qualities, the PTP permitted this performance a greater degree



The Ortofon
MC Anna paves
a new way
in audiophilia



Sound which
has to be
experienced

ortofon
accuracy in sound

500 Executive Blvd Suite 102
Ossining, NY 10562
P: (914) 762-8646
F: (914) 762-8649
INFO@ORTOFON.US
WWW.ORTOFON.US

AXPONA

AUDIO EXPO NORTH AMERICA

APRIL 15-17, 2016 • THE WESTIN O'HARE, ROSEMONT/CHICAGO, IL

North America's Premier Event for Audiophiles and Music Lovers

AXPONA Attendees Speak Out!

"AXPONA gives me the chance to see what is trending, compare high-end products and determine what sounds best to me for my budget."

Charles, Phoenix, AZ

"The 2015 AXPONA was easily the best of the past three years. I make a point of scheduling it on my calendar every year. The exhibitors and attendees are very knowledgeable and the atmosphere is great for those of us who LOVE Audio and well produced music!"

Tom, Dayton, OH

"I had fun, fun, fun till my honey took my VISA away! AXPONA had 101 ways to have fun with audio! Great sounds and learning experiences from systems you would spend months trying to hear across the country. I enjoyed every minute, especially being able to talk directly with many designers and manufacturers."

Dale, Lanexa, KS

"I had an awesome time. It gave me the opportunity to bring my sons-in-law and introduce them to something better than I-Tunes."

Mike, Palatine, IL



To Reserve Exhibit Space or for More Information about AXPONA 2016:
Steve Davis at steve@axpona.com / 386-308-5720
Mark Freed at mfreed@jdevvents.com / 203-416-1927

www.axpona.com

of gravitas. It sounded so magically dense, I *had* to lift the needle and play the beginning of the movement all over again.

Musically—in terms of melodic flow and momentum, and of sheer rhythmic rightness—to hear that record reproduced so well was to make the case, even to this fan of Mengelberg and Furtwängler and Fricsay, for the effectiveness of Karajan's Beethoven. Before sending the Solid 12 on to its rightful owner, I played a few more recordings from that set, and found them just as satisfying. Repeating one of them, the first movement of Symphony 9, on my Garrard-EMT combination provided much the same satisfaction, but I nonetheless felt that the PTP player was more up-front in presenting these recordings' strengths.

A couple of quibbles: Although the Solid 12 offers 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ and 45rpm playback—combined with the luxury of a mechanical speed control for fine tuning—its platter cannot be made to spin at 78rpm. This might be a deal-breaker for some; at the very least, it would force the shellacophile to maintain a separate rig for 78s. A lesser concern: As I mentioned in that June 2013 review, I wish that PTP's rubbery record mat were of slightly smaller diameter. I found it difficult to remove discs from the platter without lifting that darned mat with them.

But in describing those complaints, I'm reminded of something at which the Solid 12 and Schick excelled, something I don't recall noticing with the earlier version: The combination was less susceptible than my Garrard to mechanical disturbances from footfalls and the like; in fact, it was pretty darn imperturbable. Perhaps I have those new SSC feet to thank?

As for the Solid 12's new bearing, I'm tempted to conclude, however unscientifically, that it has made a difference for the better. Collectors of vintage products in any field have a not-entirely-unreasonable tendency to regard change as bad, and to always consider the oldest, rarest version of



PTP Audio's Solid Bearing (left) next to an original Lenco bearing.

The original Solid 12 impressed me; this new version was a knockout.

anything to be the best. (Q: How many vintage-audio enthusiasts does it take to change a light bulb? A: One to change the bulb, and four to moan about how much better the old one was.) But the PTP Solid Bearing seems to be one case of new being actually better: To paraphrase David Grisman's famous assessment of mandolinist Frank Wakefield, it sounds to me as though Peter Reinders has split the Lenco atom.

The true test of PTP Audio's revised Solid 12: Every LP I played on it sounded big, colorful, well textured, forceful, and endowed with the sort of momentum that led me to believe that the players and singers whose performances are preserved in those grooves had leaned into every musical curve. The original Solid 12 impressed me; this new version was a knockout. To suggest that vintage-savvy but DIYphobic phonophiles give more than passing consideration to the full-Monty Solid 12 is perhaps the easiest recommendation I've ever made: I'd be delighted to live with one of these.

—Art Dudley ■

What Is "Analog" Beauty?



Back when all music was stored and transmitted in analog, whether from an LP or tape or FM, a popular way to criticize uninspiring sound was to call it *transistory*. It wasn't that all transistor-based equipment sounded edgy and flat, but as a generalization, there was some truth to using *transistory* as an insult.

Today, the very same notion of beautiful vs. transistory is still very much with us, except that now the insult is more often "sounds digital." As with lots of great-sounding transistor-based gear, a lot of today's digital equipment sounds truly beautiful, but there still is some truth in the generalization that when digital isn't done well enough, the result is less than beautiful.

Cable is one of the important components in which beauty can be preserved or beauty can be lost. For over 30 years, AudioQuest has been building digital cables that do less damage, that better preserve the data, that allow less circuit-compromising noise into the active electronics.

Please listen for yourself and hear how AudioQuest USB, Optical, Ethernet, Thunderbolt, HDMI, AES EBU, and Digital Coax cables can help keep the beauty in your audio. Following is a little encouragement from some who have listened:

"With the AQ cables in place... clarity improved. Noise-floor dropped. Images became closer-to-3D."
—Scot Hull, parttimeaudiophile.com

"...the Vodka [Ethernet cable] seemed to remove a layer of film for superior textural reveal."
—John Darko, digitalaudioreview.net

"You get an increasingly large sound picture as you move up the line, greater differentiation between sonic elements, and a greater sense of clarity."
—Michael Lavorgna, audiostream.com

"AudioQuest's Diamond USB delivers exceptional resolution of detail, but at the same time is relaxed and easy-going."
—Robert Harley, *The Absolute Sound* (March 2012)

audioquest

JERRY RASKIN'S NEEDLEDOCTOR

Established 1979

VISIT US ON FACEBOOK
www.facebook.com/needledoctor

Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

SPIN CLEAN RECORD WASHER \$79.99 ▼



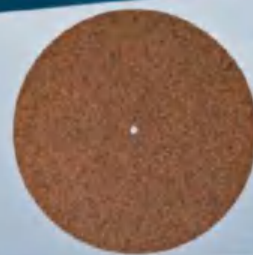
The amazing manual record cleaning machine!

MOBILE FIDELITY ORIGINAL MASTERS SLEEVES 50 PK \$20 ▼



Mobile Fidelity Inner Sleeves Have Been the Industry Standard for Over 30 Years! The BEST Protection for your Irreplaceable Vinyl!

SIMPLE MAT RECORD MAT \$26.95 ▼



I love this mat! The sonic virtues are apparent immediately - bass tightens up, vocals come forward, and more air is put around the instruments. - BRIAN LICKEL, ND

GRUV GLIDE \$39.95 ▼



"Lowers noise, cleans as it works to remove dirt that hides information and leaves a beautiful sheen to my records." - ND Customer Review

LKG DIGITAL STYLUS FORCE GAUGE \$50 ▼



Never second guess your tracking force again! Easy to use and accurate to within 0.01 grams.

MOBILE FIDELITY GEO DISC \$50 ▼



One of the most popular and easy to use cartridge alignment tools ever produced!

ONZOW ZERO DUST \$69 ▼



Discover the Onzow difference! Clean your stylus like never before!



MUSIC HALL ACRI-PLAT TURNTABLE PLATTER \$125 ▼



"The sound stage became more detailed. And of course, static and background noise is notched down a bit. My music sounds a lot more lively and dynamic. Couldn't be happier with this platter!"

AUDIOQUEST CARBON FIBER BRUSH \$15 ▼



For every day dustbusting I wouldn't kick Audioquest record brush off my vinyl either. - MICHAEL FREMER, Stereophile

www.needledoctor.com

MORE THAN A POWERED SPEAKER



◀ AUDIOENGINE 5+ POWERED BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS

BAMBOO \$469 /pair
GLOSS BLACK OR WHITE \$399 /pair

"Dynamic, well designed, and well made, the **5+** offers an elegant solution to the problem of choosing a high value desktop/nearfield monitor."

- STEVEN STONE, "Playback", AVGuide.com

- ▶ Remote Control
- ▶ Variable line out
- ▶ Full sized, 5 way binding posts
- ▶ USB power and mini-jack input
- ▶ RCA Input
- ▶ 3 year warranty

OUR BEST-SELLING PACKAGE DEAL!

DENON DP300F TURNTABLE WITH ORTOFON 2M RED ▶

ONLY \$419.00

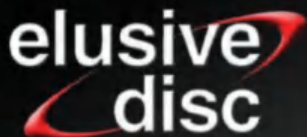
The convenience of an automatic turntable and the fidelity of a top-notch Ortofon cartridge, expertly mounted and aligned by the Needle Doctor staff!

"This has to be the best automatic turntable on the market in this price range. You really won't be disappointed. I have no problem giving this turntable 5 stars. The sound is excellent and that is all that matters" - **MIKE K**, Needle Doctor Customer



Toll Free 800.229.0644 | Phone 612.378.0543 | Fax 612.378.9024
Email info@NeedleDoctor.com | 6006 Excelsior Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416

**WORLD'S LARGEST SELECTION
OF TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES, AND NEEDLES!**



A Trusted Name Since 1989!

Find all your hot music & gear at elusivedisc.com

What you can expect from us:

- Excellent Customer Service.
- Speedy & Safe Delivery.
- Expert Help & Advice.
- The Best in Audio Equipment!
- Great Selection of Music from ABBA to ZZ Top!



Led Zeppelin!
WEA 180g Dlx LPs & CDs



Roger Waters I Amused To Death
200g 2LP, Pic Disc, SACD, Blu-Ray & CD



Grant Green I Green Street
All Music Matters 180g 33 1/3rpm LPs



Jennifer Warnes I Famous Blue Raincoat
Impex 180g LP & Gold CD



Amy Winehouse I Frank
Republic Records LP



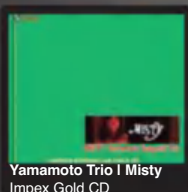
Simon & Garfunkel Columbia Albums
Columbia 180g 6LP Box



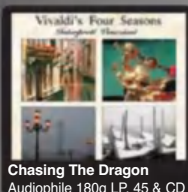
Andrew Hill I Point Of Departure
All Music Matters 180g 33 1/3rpm LPs



Nirvana I Greatest Hits
Geffen 150g LP & 45rpm 200g 2LP



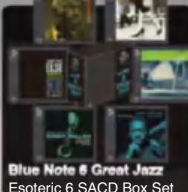
Yamamoto Trio I Misty
Impex Gold CD



Chasing The Dragon
Audiophile 180g LP, 45 & CD



Stokowski I Rhapsodies
AP RCA 200g LP & SACD



Blue Note 6 Great Jazz
Esoteric 6 SACD Box Set



Music Matters Blue Note
180g 45rpm 2LPs



David Bowie I Five Years
Parlophone 180g 13LP Box



Eric Clapton I Forever Man
Reprise 180g 2LP



DeLucia, DiMeola & McLaughlin
UNI Play 33 1/3 180g Series Vinyl



Gary Karr I Adagio D'Albinoni
King Records SACD



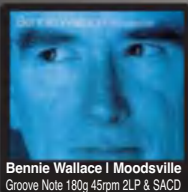
Closer To The Music Vol. 5
Stockfisch M-CH SACD



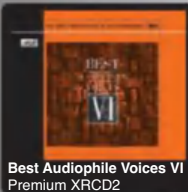
Muddy Waters I Folk Singer
AP 200g LP, 45rpm 2LP & SACD



Bruce Springsteen I Born To Run
Legacy 180g LP



Bennie Wallace I Moodsville
Groove Note 180g 45rpm 2LP & SACD



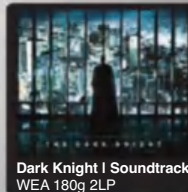
Best Audiophile Voices VI
Premium XRCD2



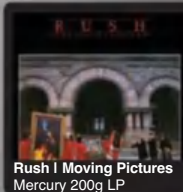
B.B. King & Eric Clapton
Audio Fidelity SACD



Jethro Tull I Aqualung
Parlophone 180g LP



Dark Knight I Soundtrack
WEA 180g 2LP



Rush I Moving Pictures
Mercury 200g LP



A plethora of products to make your precious music collection sound better than the day you bought it!



elusivedisc.com

Call Today! 800-782-3472

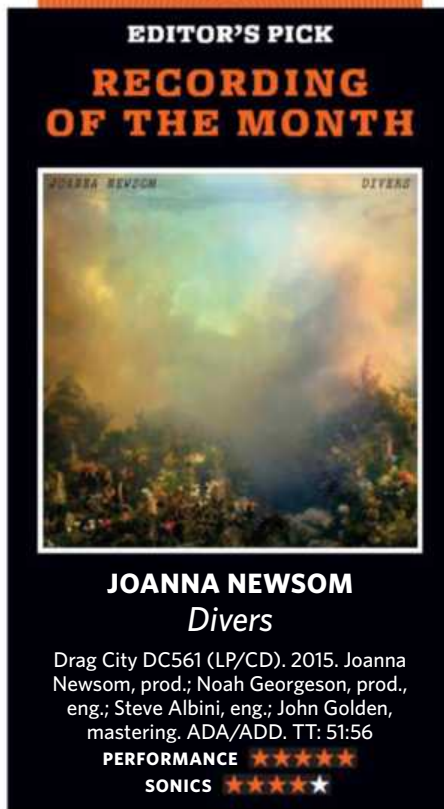
fax: 765-608-5341 Info: 765-608-5340 • 4020 frontage rd anderson, in 46013 • sales@elusivedisc.com • m-f 9-6 sat 11-3 est

RECORD REVIEWS

It's hard to imagine a more auspicious debut than Joanna Newsom's *The Milk-Eyed Mender* (Drag City DC263): Her songs on that 2004 release were imaginative, memorable, and almost uniquely literate, and her performances of them—she sang as distinctively as she wrote, and on most of them, her full-size Lyon & Healy concert harp was the sole accompanying instrument—were effective and thoroughly charming. At the age of 22, Newsom had created one of the most original pop records in memory.

If *The Milk-Eyed Mender* was original, Newsom's 2006 follow-up, *Ys* (Drag City DC303), in which she explored longer song forms and more intricate arrangements (the latter courtesy Van Dyke Parks), bordered on the visionary: a densely imaginative, five-song masterpiece. In 2010, *Have One on Me* (Drag City DC390) further stretched her thematic boundaries, showcasing an artist more mature and more at ease. Newsom's new collection, *Divers*, confirms her capacity for musical and lyrical growth, and stands as her most varied, most moving record to date.

While the title song has as its central metaphor the bond between a pearl diver and his wife, *Divers* could as easily refer to the variety of lyrical ideas and musical colors on display throughout the album. As in Newsom's previous records, recurring themes—the battlefield, the transition from city to forest, the personification of time, the interconnectedness of birth and death—are presented in tones ranging from the whimsical to the somber, and with Newsom's characteristic reliance on images of wildlife, especially birds. In mild contrast to *Ys*, the arrangements on *Divers* grow more organically from the songs themselves, with a wide palette of sonic colors—thanks especially to Newsom's own arrangements for a range of keyboard instruments, including piano, celesta, field organ, Mellotron, and various analog synthesizers. Additional arrangements, including



scoring for full orchestra and for individual string and brass instruments, were contributed by Nico Muhly, Dave Longstreth, and others.

"Anecdotes," the opening song, challenges the listener with one of Newsom's more angular melodies—and sets the stage for the similarly challenging "Sapokanikan," the first single from *Divers* and almost a miniature album unto itself. With references to Shelley, Joyce, and John Purroy Mitchell—New York City's "Boy Mayor" of 1914–17—"Sapokanikan" contains more ideas, more melodic and harmonic twists and turns, than any other five minutes of popular music I can name.

From there, *Divers* builds gradually to the emotional peak of its title song. With a compelling chord progression and melody, "Divers" is sung and performed by Newsom alone, on harp, piano, flute, Mellotron, and Hohner Guitaret—essentially, an electric thumb piano. To the Guitaret's exotic, percus-

sive sounds, the protagonist sings:

*I dream it every night:
The ringing of the pail,
The motes of sand dislodged,
The shucking, quick and bright . . .
And never will I wed.
I'll hunt the pearl of death to the
bottom of my life,
And ever hold my breath
Till I may be the diver's wife.*

There follows Newsom's harp- and banjo-driven take on the traditional "Same Old Man," after which three decidedly pensive songs comprise the sound of the album's exhalation. In "You Will Not Take My Heart Alive," the unexpected shift, in time signature and mood, to the song's chorus supplies one of *Divers*' most breathtakingly beautiful moments. This song is also where all of the album's recurring lyrical themes intersect. The protagonist of "A Pin-Light, Bent" muses gratefully on the beauty of life and the inevitability of death. And "Time, as a Symptom" expands on those same themes, to the strains of the City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra.

The sound of *Divers*, which was engineered by Steve Albini and Noah Georgeson, is best described as vivid—enjoyably so. Instruments and voices are clear, colorful, and up-front, and percussive sounds have real force and presence. There isn't a great deal of spatial depth, but the stereo stage is used creatively. The tonal balance of my WAV-file edition (a pre-release LP wasn't available) was good, though I wouldn't want an iota more treble.

For those of us who were around when the pop-music album was being transformed from a mere collection of hits and B-sides to an art form in its own right, this is where we hoped our music was heading: a work of rare literacy and intelligence, with daring arrangements that illustrate, rather than merely decorate, melodies that are often hauntingly memorable. *Divers* does nothing less than confirm Joanna Newsom as one of the most important young recording artists of our time.

—Art Dudley

#CES2016



SCIENCE MINUS *the* FICTION

THE STORY OF INNOVATION IS CONTINUALLY WRITTEN AND REWRITTEN AT CES.
DON'T MISS THE CHANCE TO ADD YOUR CHAPTER. REGISTER TODAY.

CES® 2016 JAN. 6-9, 2016

TECH EAST • TECH WEST • TECH SOUTH
LAS VEGAS, NV

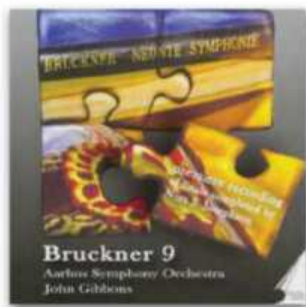
REGISTER NOW at CESweb.org



THE GLOBAL STAGE FOR INNOVATION

PRODUCED BY
 CEA

CLASSICAL



BRUCKNER

Symphony 9: Four-Movement Version

Finale completed by Nors S. Josephson, 1992.

Movements 1-3, ed. Nowak.

John Gibbons, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra
Danacord DACOCD 754 (CD). 2015. Lennart Dehn, prod., ed.; Stephan Flock, eng., ed., mastering. DDD.
TT: 80:31

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

Recordings of Bruckner's Symphony 9 that include a completion of the work's Finale, left unfinished and/or partially lost at Bruckner's death, remain rare enough that one is tempted to forgive anything lacking in the performance of the first three, completed movements. No forgiveness needed here. John Gibbons leads the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra in a meticulous, idiomatic, carefully observed performance that is faithful to the score, and one of the better three-movement Ninths of recent years. Bruckner marked the first movement "Solemn, mysterious"; it's one of the most foreboding openings of any symphony by anyone. Here it is stately, measured, deliberate, inevitable. The grinding syncopation at the climax of the first section, as huge icebergs of sound are calved from an orchestral glacier, is made austere clear. Throughout, Gibbons gives Bruckner's caesuras their full measure, if sometimes these seem less suspensions of time than time stopped dead (I think the music is better supported by the former approach). The third statement of the Gesangsperiode theme is too identical in tempo to its first statement for it to include acknowledgment of all that has come between. A quibble.

The opening of the Scherzo is more intimate than usual, with an effective sense of individual strings providing the pizzicati. For all its famously relentless pounding, this movement is actually mostly dark, delicate tracery à la Mendelssohn, and Gibbons is very good here, bringing out piano harmonies in the horns I hadn't noticed before.

The Adagio is more rueful than

anguished. Compare Simon Rattle's recording with the Berlin Philharmonic for an idea of just how harrowing the Wagner tubas in the "Farewell to Life" can be, and how much heartfelt utterance the strings' three-note responses can contain. Gibbons evokes deep sadness, not profound grief—not a criticism, but a crucial difference. Though not particularly fast in this movement, Gibbons is more fleet in just those passages that most benefit from a slight slowing. But the oboes' and clarinets' 80 repeated eighth-notes beginning at m.162 end in terrifyingly savage honks into the void, as it has always seemed to me they should: I think Gibbons could have included a bit more such ragged, raging moments throughout this obsessively rigorous score. The vast dissonance at the climax is so well balanced, so warm and burnished in tone, as to sound almost consonant. I'm not sure that was Bruckner's point, but it's beautiful; a matter of taste.

This becomes a greater problem in the Finale, where Gibbons soft-pedals Bruckner's astonishing trumpet dissonances in the development of the great chorale. Those minor seconds strike me as crucial to the dissolutions of harmony and form Bruckner explored in this movement as he did in nothing else he wrote. To underplay them is to defang the music. The real problem is Nors S. Josephson's completion. Though the CD's tray card identifies it as a "reconstruction," there has been so much good scholarship on the Finale since 1992, when Josephson finished this completion, as to render his work obsolete as a reconstruction per se. Whatever you think of the final versions of the reconstruction of the Finale by Samale, Phillips, Cohrs, and Mazzuca (and I think very highly of them; see www.tinyurl.com/yb92ug2), those scholars make what to me is an overwhelmingly convincing case for precisely how many bars of music are missing, and where.

Josephson seems to have been unaware of or ignored most of their research. He links the long passages Bruckner completed (or nearly) with passages shorter or longer than the numbers of bars indicated by Bruckner's own meticulous bar counts. He adds to apparently completed score pages what sound in some places like unnecessary figures in contrary motion, in others mere ornaments—and Bruckner's music is not ornamental. In none of his symphonies did Bruckner

score a solo or exposed passage for trombone(s) alone; Josephson does, and it sounds like Mahler, followed by a passage more Schubertian. To other pages that most Bruckner scholars agree are incomplete Josephson sometimes adds nothing—he never has the gorgeous chorale, for instance, stated by full orchestra, as Bruckner always eventually treated his chorales, and the great horn call mid-fugue still sounds like a sketch. In other passages, Bruckner's austere, bleak voicings are needlessly sweetened; in others, in which a series of modulations needs to be inserted to bridge, say, a missing 16 bars, Josephson does a harmonic equivalent of dogged vamping, and in one case inserts figures almost loopily happy-go-lucky. Some of his additions sound French, others more Czech. Except for the very end of the coda, none sounds like Bruckner—and if he replaced the missing part of the fugue, I missed it. Before he reaches the coda, Josephson recaps a theme from the first movement—something Bruckner himself often did—but not that movement's first, main theme, as was Bruckner's practice. Instead, he quotes a rising theme that appears only once, at the very end of the first movement, and so verbatim as to make it sound copied and pasted in. The theme is not transformed, except at the last instant by a shift to major that sounds like a gimmick. In short, a work rendered almost fatally fragmented by death and circumstance has been joined together again—and all one hears are the seams. What was Josephson thinking? His minimal liner note reveals little.

Had Gibbons recorded only the first three movements, he would of course have differently shaped his interpretations of all of them, and the Adagio would have had a finality that, in the context of an ensuing Finale, it cannot. Even so, the first three tracks of this generously long, well-recorded CD constitute a fine and well-played three-movement Ninth, albeit one that, at the end, necessarily hangs fire.

—Richard Lehnert

ON THE WEB

Recording of the Month

READ EVERY ONE GOING
BACK TO MARCH 1982
ON WWW.STEREOPHILE.COM

The times they are a-changin'

Bowers & Wilkins 800 Series Diamond

Didn't Just Get Better By Chance. It Got Better By Change!

We're proud to be Los Angeles' premier dealer for the new Bowers & Wilkins 800 Series Diamond loudspeakers. This latest version of Bowers and Wilkins' flagship range is their most radical overhaul yet. From cabinets to drive units, almost every component has been completely redesigned!

Weinhart Design: L.A.'s #1 Dealer

- 30+ years experience and still going strong
- AV installation, automation, integration, music, video, WiFi, lighting, surveillance, phones, service and repair
- CALL FOR A FREE system analysis
- Highest trade-ins imaginable

To Set Up Your Appointment
and Hear What's Possible, Call David Weinhart

WEINHART DESIGN, INC.

2337 Roscomare Road, Studio 1,
Los Angeles, California 90077

david@weinhartdesign.com

Showroom: 310-472-8880 By Appointment



Visit our newly redesigned website weinhartdesign.com and check out our monthly specials

BRINKMANN

Real High Fidelity.

Balance: /'ba-lən(t)s/verb, adj. : mystical state of perfect harmony



Contact One of These Brinkmann Specialists:

Ears Nova
New York, NY
212 288 2855
earsnova.com

Paragon Sight & Sound
Ann Arbor, MI
313 662 3594
paragonsns.com

The Audio Salon
Santa Monica, CA
310 863 0563
theaudiosalon.com

Advanced Audio Systems
Tacoma, WA
253 472 3133
advancedaudiosys.com

Cake Audio
San Clemente, CA
949 369 9262
cakeaudio.net

BRINKMANN
Brinkmann-USA.com

ROCK/POP

**DR. JOHN****The Atco/Atlantic Singles 1968-1974**

Omnivore OVCD-149 (CD). 2015. Harold Battiste, Allen Toussaint, others, prods.; Keith Olsen, Gary Brandt, others, engs. AAD.? TT: 71:04

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

These singles cover Mac “Dr. John” Rebennack’s time with Atlantic Records, a period when the R&B session giant began a solo career under the guidance of two important New Orleans producers of the era: Harold Battiste and, later, Allen Toussaint.

Rebennack was exiled from his hometown under D.A. Jim Garrison’s crackdown on New Orleans musicians, and followed producer/arranger and AFO Records founder Battiste to Los Angeles, where Battiste was making Sonny & Cher records that were so successful he was able to start his own production company.

Battiste needed projects for his company, and when Rebennack came to him with the Dr. John concept, he agreed to provide studio time as well as produce and arrange the sessions, which featured New Orleans luminaries Shirley Goodman, Jessie Hill, Plas Johnson, and Richard “Didimus” Washington. Battiste made the first two Dr. John records for Atlantic, *Gris-Gris* and *Babylon*, in the same Los Angeles studio where he cut Sonny & Cher’s classics. Battiste crafted a completely original sound for the Dr. John albums, giving Rebennack’s voodoo-influenced songwriting a dense, tropical-rainforest mix of bird-call horns and dark, multilayered polyrhythms on *Gris-Gris*, and an out-and-out apocalyptic vision on *Babylon*. Though these records were not commercially successful, they codified a legend on which Rebennack built a career.

Battiste chose as singles the statement-of-purpose track “I Walk on Gilded Splinters” for release as a two-sided mono 45, as well as “Gris-Gris Gumbo Ya Ya,” “Mama Roux,”

and “Jump Sturdy” from the first album, and a mono mixdown of “The Patriotic Flag Waver,” from *Babylon*. Back then, singles were mastered for maximum audible impact through mono car-radio speakers, and typically sounded hotter than album tracks. The CD transfers here are dramatically more intense than the intentionally murky album tracks, with Rebennack’s voice and the articulation of the percussion instruments particularly more noticeable. The sound quality is far superior to Rhino’s *Mos’ Scocious: The Dr. John Anthology* (1993).

Dr. John’s third album, *Remedies*, was only half completed when Atlantic released it (“Angola Anthem,” 17:33 long, remains unfinished), but it featured the excellent single “Loop Garoo”/“Wash Mama Wash,” which continued in the *Gris-Gris* mode. Tom Dowd was at the board for those recordings, but Battiste resumed his producing and arranging duties on the transitional *Gumbo* album, Rebennack’s tribute to the classic New Orleans R&B he grew up listening to and, in some cases, playing. Mac revisited James “Sugar Boy” Crawford’s original version of “Iko Iko,” a rollicking piano rundown compared to the more popular vocal version later recorded by the Dixie Cups; he also included a killer remake of Earl King’s “Big Chief,” and a lively “Huey Smith Medley” of “High Blood Pressure,” “Don’t You Just Know It,” and “I’ll Be John Brown.” These singles established Dr. John as not only a carrier of voodoo mythologies but a bona-fide New Orleans piano professor.

The album’s last nine tracks collect the Allen Toussaint-produced singles that yielded Dr. John’s biggest sellers. As a producer, Toussaint, the consummate hitmaker, was almost the opposite image of Battiste, framing Rebennack in a much more user-friendly format playing sprightly funk classics, as opposed to the brooding, heart-of-darkness visions that Battiste’s arrangements conjured. Here the jaunty “Right Place, Wrong Time,” “Such a Night,” “Life,” and “Mos’ Scocious” became the commercial perfection of the Dr. John idiom, backed by the cutting-edge 1970s funk of the Meters.

—John Swenson

ON THE WEB

EVERY “RECORDS TO DIE FOR”!
ON WWW.STEREOPHILE.COM

**BILLY GIBBONS AND THE BFG'S**
Perfectamundo

Concord 7237886 (CD). 2015. Billy Gibbons, prod.; Joe Hardy, prod., eng. ADD.? TT: 39:18

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

If you’re looking for ZZ Top’s “Sharp Dressed Man,” you’ve come to the wrong place, but if it’s smart, cutting-edge, guitar-context music you want, *Perfectamundo* is what you’ve been waiting for. Billy Gibbons brings a whole new sound to bear in an impressive display of guitar histrionics that has little to do with conventional soloing and everything to do with texture and melting point. Tonally, Gibbons goes molten here with an otherworldly approach that fuses hard blues, clave rhythms, hip-hop production techniques, and soul jazz, experimenting with an entirely fresh approach to the Texas blues canon.

Gibbons approached this solo project with an idea to filter his Texas-blues sensibilities through the prism of the Afro-Cuban music he learned as a kid in New York from the maestro himself, Tito Puente. The pulsing rhythms swing with authentic Latin boogaloo feeling, Gibbons even plays timbales and other percussion instruments. The music of Cuba and Texas blues are more closely related than you might think, which Gibbons demonstrates in Lightnin’ Hopkins’s “Baby Please Don’t Go,” and Roy Head’s Texas R&B anthem “Treat Her Right.”

Gibbons underscores his multicultural intentions by using a band comprising two keyboardists, the Argentine-born and Puerto Rico-raised Martin Guigui and Austin-based Hammond B3 organ whiz Mike Flanigan; Houston bassist Alex Garza, who adds hip-hop vocals on the title track, “You’re What’s Happenin’, Baby,” and “Quiero Mas Dinero”; and a percussion section of drummer Greg Morrow and the Cubano Nonale Beat Generator ensemble. —John Swenson

ifi

ADD THE RICHNESS OF TUBES

— To Any System —

ifi iTube Tube Buffer
\$299



musicdirect

800-449-8333 | MUSICDIRECT.COM



“Truly Superior Sound - The sound through the Doshi Audio V3.0 products was warm and inviting as in, “I must hear more.””

- Jason Serinus. Stereophile, “AXPONA 2014”



MADE IN AMERICA
www.doshiaudio.com

Contact U.S. Dealer:



(734) 662-3595
www.paragonsns.com



GRUPO FANTASMA
Problemas

Blue Corn Music BCM 1504 (CD). 2015. Steve Berlin, prod.; Jim Eno, Brad Bell, engs. AAD? TT: 44:08

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Quick—when was the last time you woke up one morning and thought, “Wow, I *really* wish I could hear a Spanish-language version of the Beatles’ *Abbey Road* gem ‘Because’”? Yeah, me neither. But Austin’s reigning Latin funk soul brothers Grupo Fantasma have made the decision for us, rendering their “Porque” as a kind of sensual *bolero* ballad rather than the dreamy psych of the original, while still retaining the signature lush vocal harmonies.

It’s indicative of the Texas dectet’s prevailing aesthetic: to create traditional Latin roots music while upending expectations and incorporating elements of hip-hop, indie rock, and jazz, as well as world music from Africa, Eastern Europe, and South America. *Problemas*, their fifth full-length, is particularly noteworthy by virtue of producer Steve Berlin; the Los Lobos member, er, definitely knows a thing or two about Latin music. The alliance is apt. Basking in a broadly textured front-of-hall ambience with particular detail in the low end, the group serves up everything from swingin’ big-band Afro-Puerto Rican *bomba* (“Mulato”) to rousing staccato-horns salsa with a side of island guitar (“Problemas”) to a sinewy Nuyorican-styled *bugalú* (“Cayuco”) that suggests a summit between Mongo Santamaria and—check the guitar solo—Santana.

Elsewhere, you hear elements of mambo, south-of-the-border *cumbia*, New Orleans funk, Peruvian *chicha*, and more. It’s all so upbeat and infectious that the fact that you might not understand what they’re singing is no barrier to enjoyment. The name Grupo Fantasma translates, tellingly, as “ghost group”: *Problemas* is nothing less than haunting and hypnotic. —Fred Mills



PROMISED LAND SOUND
For Use and Delight

Paradise of Bachelors PoB-22 (CD). 2015. Jason Meagher, prod., eng.; Jem Cohen, Mitch Jones, prods.; Jeremy Ferguson, eng. AAD? TT: 48:16

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

More proof that Nashville actually is Music City USA and not just Country Music City USA—and, indeed, this Jack White–approved outfit, with its sundry stylistic kinships, makes quite the indie-rock ambassador for the town.

Certain comparisons are inevitable: On the young combo’s sophomore platter one encounters elements both overt and suggestive of the Rolling Stones (earworm riffs), Quicksilver Messenger Service (lyrical guitar bal-lets), the Byrds (cosmic-cowboy vibes), Big Star (unusual melodic twists), and Tom Petty (yearning/drawing vocals). Beyond that, though, these cats have a remarkable slow-burn intensity that sneaks up, grabs you, and holds on.

Highlights? How about the rootsy romance and psychedelic sonics of opener “Push and Pull (All the Time)” Or the intricate fingerstyle interplay that powers “Dialogue,” featuring guest fretboard virtuoso Steve Gunn? Or maybe even the stomping power pop of “Golden Child” and the closing gem, “Within Sight,” which, over the course of six minutes, morphs from an *Untitled*-era Byrdsian trope into a modal Middle Eastern meditation and, finally, into a wah-wah-fueled garage raveup that’ll send concertgoers off into the night happily abuzz?

For Use and Delight definitely lives up to its title. The overall sound—don’t overlook the ghostly intimacy of the vocals, with harmonies recalling both the Eagles and contemporary act Dawes; and the subtle yet expansive keyboard fills at the arrangements’ edges are quite lovely.

—Fred Mills

JitterBug Beetle DragonFly



Three years ago, AudioQuest shook the hi-fi world with the first version of our **DragonFly DAC—Preamp—Headphone Amp**. Now, two exciting new critters—JitterBug and Beetle—join DragonFly on the forefront of digital audio.

With its sophisticated dual-discrete noise-dissipation circuitry, our JitterBug USB filter significantly reduces the noise and ringing that plague the data and power lines of USB ports, allowing all digital audio files to achieve greater levels of **resolution and musicality**.

“I have no hesitation in declaring, loudly and longly, that I can think of no way to spend \$49 that would make me more enjoy my computer-based audio than the AudioQuest JitterBug.”

—John Atkinson, *Stereophile*, September 2015

Meanwhile, our Beetle DAC is equipped with three highly optimized digital inputs—Toslink, Bluetooth, and USB—making it an excellent complement to HD televisions, cable set-top boxes, gaming consoles, media players, music streamers, laptops, tablets, and mobile devices.

With DragonFly, JitterBug, and Beetle, beautiful sound is yours—when you want it, where you want it.

audioquest

Known By The Companies We Keep

*Since 1977. Enduring Products.
Endearing Relationships. Passion for Music*



B&W 802 D3

• Anthem • Arcam • Audeze • Audio Quest • Audio Research
• Auralic • Aurender • Ayre • B&W • Esoteric • Benz Micro
• Bluesound • Clearaudio • Dynaudio • Grado • JL Audio • Linn
• Magnepan • Marantz • Mark Levinson • McIntosh • MSB • NAD
• Nordost • Ortofon • Paradigm • Parasound • PrimaLuna
• Pro-Ject • PSB • Revel • Runco • Savant • Sennheiser • Sony
• Sumiko • Totem • Transparent • Wilson
and more

5 TAKE AUDIO

Design, Installation, Calibration, Service High Trade-Ins , & Consignments

105 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, CT 06510 • 203-777-1750

Tues day - Fri day 10am-6pm • Saturday 10am-5pm

www.take5audio.com



Wilson Audio Sabrina

Now On Display: AudioQuest Nighthawk Headphones, Ayre KX-R/MX-R Reference Twenty Preamplifier and Mono Block Amplifiers, Aurender N100T Music Server, Audeze LCD3 Headphones, Auralic Aries Headphone Amp, VPI Prime, Bowers & Wilkins Speaker Line, Esoteric K-05X CD Player, Parasound Halo Integrated, and more.



UNLEASH the DYNAMIC HEADROOM in YOUR SYSTEM!

Bruce Jacobs: Audio Design and Marketing
p. 651 315 4248 • e. bruce@stillpoints.us

Stillpoints
stillpoints.us

JAZZ


KARRIN ALLYSON
Many a New Day

Karrin Allyson, vocals; Kenny Barron, piano; John Patitucci, bass
 Motema MTA-CD-183 (CD). 2015. Karrin Allyson, Michael Leonhart, prods.; Katherine Miller, eng. DDD. TT: 54:36

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

There is no shortage of jazz singers, but only a few make the A-list. Karrin Allyson does not have Cassandra Wilson's soul or Dianne Reeves's chops, but she has impeccable control over her come-hither voice. She can be waiflike, sly, sexy, or worldly wise, often in the same song.

Her new album is all musical-theater pieces by Rodgers and Hammerstein. The sources are *Oklahoma*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*. No such project has ever been undertaken by a jazz singer. Allyson's interpretations are individual rather than definitive. Songs associated with particular characters and movies, such as "Bali Ha'i" and "I Have Dreamed," become current, personal, standalone creative statements. "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" and "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top" lose any vestiges of Pollyanna sentiment. Allyson makes them cool, crisp vehicles for blowing.

She made a brilliant decision by choosing only two world-class collaborators, pianist Kenny Barron and bassist John Patitucci. Barron's exquisite details and fills always arrive exactly on time. "Something Good" is perhaps the most indispensable of the 14 tracks. Patitucci makes it balance on a tipping point of conjectural emotion, which he then releases and fulfills in a rapt, heartfelt solo. The spare ensemble format creates open space for each musician to develop intimate relationships with songs embedded in the American psyche.

The engineering by Katherine Miller is an object lesson in how to record a voice and two instruments with clarity and presence.—Thomas Conrad


MICHAEL CAIN
Sola

Michael Cain, piano, keyboards, programming; Julian Tanaka, clarinet; Eddie Rich, saxophone; Mike Gonzales, trumpet; James Genus, Abo Gumroyan, bass; Renaldo Elliot, Billy Hart, drums
 Native Drum 003 (CD). 2015. Michael Cain, prod.; Michael Brorby, Vincent Castaldo, engs. DDD. TT: 41:28

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Following up *Solo* (2011), a reverie for solo piano and electronics, the underrated Michael Cain returns with an ensemble date, *Sola*. His glitchy, beat-oriented side—the brilliant synthesizer hues, complex and haunting chords, arcing electric-piano lines, and fat bass tones—comes across on six tracks with his "Vegas Band," which includes three horns and rhythm section. The remaining two tracks, with his "New York Band"—James Genus and Billy Hart—highlight Cain's jazz-trio side, though only the closing ballad, "My Moyo," is acoustic.

An intriguing, somewhat elusive sideman for the likes of Jack DeJohnette and Meshell Ndegeocello, Cain has developed a sound that's conversant with jazz, electronic music, Eastern musics, and other influences. That seamlessness is all over *Sola*, from the rubato blend of clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, and multiple keyboards in "Orun" to the limping meter and descending melodic hook of "Esu Dance," and in the techno pulse and inspired three-horn passages of "Wogg."

Produced and mixed by Cain, *Sola* is at its most ambitious with "In the Front Door," a reference to battling racial segregation. Cain weaves in the speaking voice of his mentor, the late bandleader Gerald Wilson, to relate the early-1960s success of the NAACP in integrating the music venues of Las Vegas, where Cain was raised. It's a beautiful gesture, set to a spacey, in-the-pocket groove.

—David R. Adler

**"extraordinarily
powerful...
uncolored...
natural"**

— John Atkinson, *Stereophile*


The JosephAudio Pulsar

15" High, 8 1/2" Wide.

Spectacularly Deep.

Get the full story at

www.josephaudio.com

"Devastatingly right"

**"The Pulsars are
veritable light-sabers"**

— Steven Stone, *The Absolute Sound*

**"For those of you who have
dreamed of owning relatively
compact stand mount monitors
that really do convey the sense of
reproducing (near) full-range bass,
your loudspeaker
has arrived!"**

— Chris Martens, *The Absolute Sound*

JosephAudio

**EFFORTLESS MUSICALITY
EXCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGY
(800) 474- HIFI (4434)**

Balanced From Source To Sound



M1 Digital to Analog Converter

Exclusive M28 Dealers

Audio Revelation
San Diego/Orange County, CA

Sounds Real Audio
Bellingham, WA

Sound Consultant
Lacrosse, WI

M28 Monoblock Amplifier

www.bricasti.com

Stereo by Design
Pompano Beach, FL

CUTTING EDGE COMPUTER (AND ANALOG!) AUDIO

• PURE MUSIC® V2

Enhances and Complements Apple's iTunes with:

- Native DSD File Playback (via DoP) or Automatic PCM Conversion
- Automatic Sample Rate Switching up to 384 kHz and 5.6 MHz DSD
- Multi-Amp Crossover / Audio Plug-ins for Room Correction / EQ, etc.
- Docks with iTunes - supports Apple iOS Remote App
- Much, much more...

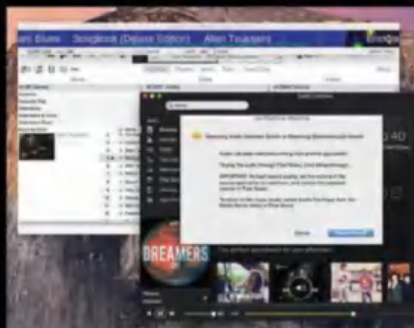
• PURE VINYL™ V4

- High Resolution Vinyl Ripping / Software RIAA Compensation / Editing
- Links LP Playback with High Resolution (192/24) Digital



• SETA® Phono Preamplifiers

- Includes Flat Output, Ideal for use with Pure Vinyl
- Fully Balanced / Battery Powered
Low Noise / DC to 5,000,000 Hz (-3 dB)
- Stereophile Editors' Choice "Class A" Recommendation (Model L)



Pure Music Includes Streamthrough
Play Internet Streamed Audio and use Pure Music EQ, audio plug-ins, crossover, metering, etc. with automatic switching from file playback to streaming (automatic stream detection), all from the same music player software!*

CHANNEL D - Celebrating 20 Years In Business 1995-2015 / www.channld.com

*Streamthrough may not be suitable for all computer / DAC combinations. Please download and try our free Demo to determine the performance on your own system.



**GERRY GIBBS
THRASHER DREAM TRIO**
Live in Studio

Gerry Gibbs, drums; Ron Carter, bass; Kenny Barron, piano. With: Roy Hargrove, trumpet, flugelhorn; Cassandra Wilson, vocals
Whaling City Sound WCS 076 (CD). 2015. Gerry Gibbs, prod.; Mike Marciano, eng. DDD. TT: 77:38

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Drummer Gerry Gibbs had a killer idea for a jazz record: Start with a trio containing major talents like Kenny Barron and Ron Carter. Add guests like the most important living jazz singer, Cassandra Wilson, and a prominent trumpet player, Roy Hargrove. Use a great studio, Systems Two in Brooklyn. Invite a bunch of friends to the sessions, for a live audience. Put together a playlist of pop classics from the 1950s and '60s. Turn everybody loose with no rehearsals or arrangements, only lead sheets. If this record does not make you grin, see a doctor.

Trio tunes like "Wives and Lovers" and "Spartacus: Love Theme" hurtle forward like bullet trains. Barron improves and renews every song, riding the merciless swing of Gibbs and Carter. Michel Legrand's "The Summer Knows," usually a wistful ballad, prances and snaps. Vince Guaraldi's "Cast Your Fate to the Wind," normally hovering and hypnotic, is forthright and funky.

There are also pieces that quiet the studio audience. In "The Look of Love" and "Alfie," Wilson reveals again that her black-magic voice can uncover new meaning in any worthwhile song. Hargrove lingers over "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?," barely changing its melody but deepening its plea.

This is an atypical Systems Two recording because all five musicians played live in one room, with no isolation (but with a clapping audience). It still has the clean, truthful, front-row Systems Two sound.

—Thomas Conrad



NOAH PREMINGER
Pivot: Live at the 55 Bar

Noah Preminger, tenor saxophone; Jason Palmer, trumpet; Kim Cass, bass; Ian Froman, drums
Noah Preminger (no catalog number) (CD). 2015.
Noah Preminger, prod.; Jimmy Katz, prod., eng. DDD.
TT: 64:23

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

The famous jazz photographer Jimmy Katz came late to his second career as a sound engineer. He may now be the best in the business at recording jazz live. Jazz has long presented a dilemma for audiophiles, requiring them to choose between studio resolution or live blood and guts. Katz gives both.

He recorded this gig at the 55 Bar, a funky little Greenwich Village dive, in summer 2015. Tenor saxophonist Noah Preminger had just formed a new quartet. They play two songs by Bukka White, "Parchman Farm Blues" and "Fixin' to Die Blues," at 32 minutes each. The blues are used to establish a vernacular, a particular cultural environment, out of which Preminger and trumpeter Jason Palmer blow free and kick hard. Bassist Kim Cass and drummer Ian Froman are new names, but are perfect for Preminger's concept.

Preminger unleashes long, diverse, stream-of-consciousness chronicles in an absolute present, trusting his impulses. He rides the relentless ensemble momentum into one jarring idea after another, without repeating himself. It is also stimulating to follow the convoluted pathways of Palmer, who discovers vivid, complete staccato forms on the fly. Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry invented this genre of high risk and high reward, but Preminger and Palmer make it grittier, more physical, more propulsive, even more about the blues.

This is a record for those who like their jazz albums raw, from real life. Katz gives you the night. You feel the heat as music burns into the air.

—Thomas Conrad

LA Lehmannaudio

Ready to
fall in love
again?

Rekindle your vinyl
romance with a tiny
box from Germany.



Black Cube Phono Stage

The classic on the pulse of time.

Distributed by:

ORTOFON INC
500 Executive Blvd Suite 102
Ossining, NY 10562
Phone: (914) 762-8646
Fax: (914) 762-8649
info@ortofon.us
www.ortofon.us

Music to your ears.

www.lehmannaudio.com/black-cube

Advanced technology – at an affordable price!

Dayton Audio's new B652-AIR 6-1/2" speakers feature a pleated ribbon diaphragm AMT tweeter. Experience the already famous sound quality of the B652—now with even more smoothness and detail!

- Air Motion Transformer tweeter provides treble clarity
- The most reasonably priced speaker using AMT technology
- 5-year warranty and 45-day no-hassle return policy

"...the least-expensive way to share our enthusiasm for recorded music."—John Atkinson, *Stereophile*

Visit parts-express.com/spm for more information



Distributed By:

PARTS
EXPRESS

Toll-free 800-338-0531
725 Pleasant Valley Dr.
Springboro, OH 45066

For a full list of worldwide distributors visit: daytonaudio.com

David Lewis Audio Ltd

THE FINEST IN HIGH END AUDIO

**KEF
BLADE**



Aerial	Joseph
Aesthetix	KEF
AMG	Luxman
ATC	Naim
Audience	Nola
Audio Physic	Octave
Audio Research	Pass Labs
Balanced Audio	Primare
Bergmann	Proac
Boulder	Simaudio
Chord	SME
Clearaudio	Sonus Faber
Conrad Johnson	Soulution
D'Agostino	Totem
DCS	Unison
Dynaudio	Verity
Exposure	Vienna
Feickert	Vivid
Hegel	YG Acoustics

DAVIDLEWISAUDIO.COM

215-725-4080



VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Complete Bee Hive Sessions

Mosaic MD12-261 (12 CDs). 2015. Jim Neumann, Susan Neumann, Fred Norsworthy, Bob Porter, orig. prods.; Michael Cuscuna, reissue prod.; Malcolm Addey, Ben Rizzi, Paul Serrano, reissue engs. AAD. TT: 12:23:56

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Founded in 1977 by the avid jazz record collector Jim Neumann and his wife, Susan, Bee Hive Records concentrated on under-recognized hard-bop musicians at a time when bebop had fallen from favor. Now Mosaic Records has released a limited-edition boxed set containing all 16 albums issued by Bee Hive before it folded in 1984, featuring such accomplished second-tier boppers as baritone saxophonist Nick Brignola, tenor saxophonist Sal Nistico, trumpeter Dizzy Reese, guitarist Sal Salvador, and pianist Ronnie Mathews, plus such non-boppers as singer Johnny Hartman and tenor saxophonist Arnett Cobb. Besides the bandleaders, these sessions are notable for their strong rhythm sections, which include bassists Walter Booker, George Duvivier, Dave Holland, and Sam Jones, and drummers Vernel Fournier, Panama Francis, Roy Haynes, and Joe Morello. Solid if unspectacular, the music is consistently rewarding.

Nick Brignola is joined by three other baritone players on his two albums—Pepper Adams on *Baritone Madness*, and Ronnie Cuber and Cecil Payne on *Burn Brigade*. It's often hard to tell which is playing, though Brignola has a darker tone than Adams or Payne. Charlie Parker wrote half the tunes on *Baritone Madness* but none on *Burn Brigade*, yet both albums are steeped in bebop, exemplified most virtuosically by Brignola and Adams's breakneck rendition of Parker's "Donna Lee." Brignola also appears on Sal Nistico's album *Neo Nistico*, where the two solo cogently over Roy Haynes's blistering beat on the Charlie

Parker–Dizzy Gillespie bop standard "Anthropology." Nistico in turn appears on Curtis Fuller's *Fire and Filigree*, complementing the trombonist in a sprightly post-bop vein.

The Jamaican-born Dizzy Reese plays crackling bebop on his *Manhattan Project*, which features tenor saxophonists Clifford Jordan and Charles Davis; the three venture slightly beyond bop in the smoking "One for Trane." Jordan was a Chicago native (as is Neumann), and his album *Hyde Park after Dark* boasts an all-Chicago cast, including tenor saxophonist Von Freeman, whose quirky approach contrasts nicely with Jordan's straight-ahead style. Ironically, on Jordan's tastily cooking *Dr. Chicago*, the sidemen, among them trumpeter Red Rodney and pianist Jaki Byard, are not from the Windy City.

On his acclaimed album *Once in Every Life*, the baritone balladeer Johnny Hartman gives warmly romantic treatments to such standards as "For All We Know" and "Moonlight in Vermont." On his two albums, *Starfishers* and *Juicy Lucy* (each with different personnel), Sal Salvador picks bebop, blues, and ballads with sleek aplomb, most tellingly in his richly chorde, unaccompanied portion of "Darn That Dream." Ronnie Mathews expands into modal-jazz territory on his two albums, *Roots, Branches & Dances* and *Legacy*, joined on tenor saxophone by Frank Foster on the first, and by Ricky Ford on the second.

Pianist Roland Hanna is credited as leader on the spiritedly bopping *The New York Jazz Quartet in Chicago*, which also features saxophonist Frank Wess, bassist George Mraz, and drummer Ben Riley. Pianist Dick Katz, known mainly as an accompanist, leads a quintet including Wess, and then a trio on his *In High Profile*, displaying his keyboard prowess in the Gershwin brothers' "But Not for Me," and his arranging talent in Oscar Pettiford's "Laverne Walk." Pianist Junior Mance's *Truckin' and Trakin'* takes a bluesy direction with help from former Ray Charles tenor saxophonist David "Fathead" Newman. With Mance on piano, Arnett Cobb recorded the final Bee Hive album, *Keep On Pushin'*, displaying his breathy ballad mastery in a session that swings but doesn't bop. As such, it stands out, avoiding the air of sameness that tinges much of the label's output.

—Larry Birnbaum



AL COHN & JIMMY ROWLES

Heavy Love

Al Cohn, tenor saxophone; Jimmy Rowles, piano. Xanadu Master Edition/Elemental 906073 (CD). 1977/2015. Don Schlitten, prod.; Richard Alderson, eng.; Zev Feldman, reissue prod. ADD. TT: 48:24

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

The Xanadu Master Edition series revives albums produced in the 1970s and '80s by the late founder of Xanadu Records, Don Schlitten, that had languished out of print for years. Some masters and all original artwork were lost in Hurricane Sandy, but Elemental has restored everything it could, and the haul is substantial.

Heavy Love, a duo set by Al Cohn and Jimmy Rowles from 1977, is among the handful of inaugural reissues. Cohn's Xanadu stint was significant: two dates co-led with Dexter Gordon, two quartet sessions with bebop piano sage Barry Harris, plus the new twofer *Night Flight to Dakar/Jazz in Africa*, documenting a 1980 tour with fellow tenorman Billy Mitchell. *Heavy Love* stands apart, however: two especially deep song interpreters saunter through such non-obvious picks as "Them There Eyes" and "Taking a Chance on Love."

As David Himmelstein wrote, in his hipsterish and overdone original liner note, Cohn came "out of Lesterville." The brilliant Rowles, meanwhile, does much to justify Schlitten's description of him as "the world's greatest accompanist." He typically solos second, though his rubato introductions to "These Foolish Things" and "I Hadn't Anyone Till You" put him firmly in the foreground. Balance is a problem, and most apparent when they're trading fours: Cohn's expressive peaks are a bit too hot in the mix, and Rowles's sound isn't equally present. Still, *Heavy Love* is a riveting portrait of two masters. Deeper historical background on both in the CD booklet would have been welcome.—David R. Adler

MANUFACTURERS' COMMENTS

THIS ISSUE: Audeze, Convergent Audio Technology, GoldenEar, London, Mark Levinson, and Parasound comment on our reviews of their products.

Parasound Halo Integrated

Editor:

Thank you for your thorough review of our Halo Integrated amplifier (November 2015, p.107). The Parasound staff and I are delighted that Herb Reichert enjoyed listening to the Halo Integrated and gave it his most enthusiastic recommendation. We also appreciate that Herb went to the effort of reporting on each of the Halo Integrated's functional sections—phono stage, headphone amp, D/A converter, line stage, crossovers, and power amp—in such detail and depth. Herb also makes an important point about Parasound value in noting the absolute compatibility of our modestly priced Halo Integrated with highly demanding loudspeakers that have heretofore required disproportionately expensive electronics. We also thank John Atkinson for performing such a complete battery of measurements, which illustrate the technical prowess of this unique product. We're especially proud of this accomplishment: everything that Herb heard is backed up 100% by JA's objective testing.

—Richard Schram, President
Parasound Products

Audeze EL-8

Editor:

Thanks to Herb Reichert for his entertaining and erudite review of the Audeze EL-8. As Herb says, "Headphones are the same as loudspeakers—except that they're designed to be experienced in the listener's extreme nearfield. I've always preferred listening to my Quad ESLs and Falcon LS3/5a speakers very close up—say, from a distance of 3' to 7'. Sitting so close minimizes room colorations and intensifies the energy field, making instruments and voices extra clear and physically tangible . . . Listening to earspeakers is a natural extension of that practice. With headphones, you're *always* in the sweet spot."

The EL-8s feature iconic industrial design by BMW DesignWorksUSA. Their 100mm planar-magnetic drivers have the largest surface area of any headphones in their class. They're easy to drive with Audeze's exclusive Fluxor Magnetic technology, ultrathin diaphragms, and advanced voice-coil technology, which allow a wide variety of portable players and

headphone amps to immerse the listener in sound. The EL-8 Titanium comes with our Cypher cable, which uses the iPhone's Lightning port to take the 24-bit digital signal from the iPhone and convert it to analog. Listen to music, interact with Siri, and make or take phone calls on your Apple device.

Of course, it's the sound that matters, and as Herb says, "The EL-8s' special beauty was their holistic way with space and inner detail—they made music seem beautifully proportional and correctly formed." We're sure everyone will feel the same way once they audition the EL-8s, open or closed-back.

Finally, a big thanks to all our customers around the world for helping to make Audeze what it is today.

—Sankar Thiagasamudram, CEO
Audeze

London Maroon

Editor:

London cartridges are very high output (>6mV), so don't need a step-up of any sort. The best tonearms for them are unpivots, or our parallel-tracking, air-bearing arm—and if damping is available, that's even better. Optimal effective mass for the tonearm is 19gm, and we can provide a 5gm headshell weight, if required. We can service, overhaul, and repair, with a one-year warranty, any Decca or London model.

Thank you, Art, for a thorough and professional review. And if you really like the least-expensive Maroon model, you'd absolutely love the most expensive: the Reference!

—Brian Smith
Presence Audio

GoldenEar Technology Triton Five

Editor:

We very much appreciate Herb's glowing comments on the sonic performance of the Triton Five. His superlatives reached deep into the gestalt of the Five and really brought out, in a hyper-descriptive way, many of the things that Bob and our team and I worked so hard on. I don't know if I have ever before read such beautiful, colorful language in the service of audiophilia. I was pleased that, with Line Magnetic's amp, he found it a "beguiling amp-speaker combo" that "showed me everything" as he listened to Moondog,

so that "[h]is instruments seemed tangible and real—positioned right there on the concrete in front of me." This is, after all, our goal: bringing music alive.

Similarly, with the Vinnie Rossi amplifier, I was thrilled that Herb found that "it created a modestly priced system capable of elite audiophile sound. Crystalline images sat in real acoustic spaces. Vocal and instrumental timbres were exact and attention getting." Exactly as is our goal!

Beyond getting lost in Yehudi Menuhin, more important to many was that Herb was so thrilled with how well "they effectively reproduced existential rock ennui." The fact that Herb "had never before experienced a 7" 45rpm single produce so much transparent air and space" really reinforces our success, focusing on uncolored, high-definition sound and superb imaging. Although Herb felt that our HVFR tweeter "is surely what makes the Five throw such enormous soundstages," it is, really, just a part of a mix that includes narrow baffles, proprietary cast-basket bass/midrange drivers, our unique balanced crossover, and much development time in our full-size anechoic chamber, which is an exact duplicate of the famous one at the NRC. However, I can't disagree with his thought that the HVFR tweeter "makes the Five sound so velvety and delectable," or at least in part.

I was glad Herb noted the Triton Five's "very clean, hyperdetailed audiophile sound," and that the Fives were able to "reproduce musical instruments and voices at their own natural sizes." I was pleased he felt, even in comparison with his four-times-plus-more-expensive reference DeVores, that "[t]he Triton Five's tonal character was conspicuously well balanced and authentic, entirely smooth and easy flowing, and the bass was admirably detailed and extended." Even better, in comparison with those excellent, much more costly speakers, was Herb's observation that, "Inarguably, the GoldenEar Triton Fives imaged better than the DeVore Orangutans." High praise indeed! I loved that he concluded: "Most important, at \$1998.98 a pair, a pair of Triton Fives could be worth several times that price."

Oh, I had a few quibbles with what I saw as some rather clear inconsistencies.

And I'm not quite sure why there was such a huge focus on the comparative listening with the amps, rather than on the speaker itself. But I'm happy that the speakers are revealing enough to let you hear differences both subtle and dramatic, something usually reserved for much more expensive loudspeakers. Herb, thanks for the many kind words!

—Sandy Gross
GoldenEar Technology

CAT SL1 Renaissance Black Path Edition Editor:

Thanks to Robert Deutsch for an insightful review of the Black Path Edition of the SL1 Renaissance. We have always valued his carefully considered and thoughtful reviews. I particularly enjoyed this review because he refers to the ability of our product to convey the essence of the performance, which is more important than all of the audiophile qualities combined.

I do have a couple of comments to make about the opening paragraphs.

First, although it is true that, back in the 1990s, when the race for “best pre-amp” was tight, we did incorporate new upgrades into our products ASAP, as Bob states, we no longer do this. The SL1 Renaissance has been completely unchanged in production from its introduction, in 2007, until the release of the Black Path Edition, in 2014.

The other quibble is that the moving-coil transformer is not available as a separate option. The phono stage is an option, but it comes *with* the MC transformer. We have had a couple of people ask to get the phono stage but opt out of the transformer, making the assumption that their very expensive outboard MC transformer must be better, but we explain that their MC tranny can be plugged into the MM phono input. I've always encouraged these people to compare their outboard unit with the internal transformer, and the CAT MCX-1 has won every time. (Admittedly, our transformer has a big advantage because it does not have to drive the capacitance of an interconnect.)

—Ken Stevens, Senior Engineer
Convergent Audio Technology

Mark Levinson No.585 Editor:

Our sincere thanks to Larry Greenhill and John Atkinson for their thorough review and comprehensive measurements of the Mark Levinson No.585 integrated amplifier.

Larry's experiences with his Quad ESL-989s were interesting. Although

electrostatic speakers can be extremely musical, they also can be permanently damaged if overdriven, hence the aggressive power-limiting circuitry in the Quads. This, coupled with their low sensitivity and a healthy listening level, would have caused them to activate their protection frequently as well as to make significant power demands on the No.585. Nevertheless, as Larry reported, the No.585 made “the very best” sound he's ever gotten from the Quads, cooling itself off as needed, just as we intended.

We ourselves have tested the No.585 with a variety of dynamic speakers, from low-sensitivity cones to high-sensitivity horns, and from simple two-way bookshelf systems to highly reactive multiway systems, and it has driven all of them with aplomb. Larry's Revel Ultima Salon2s definitely fit into that latter category, and he observed no unexpected behavior when he used them with the No.585. We also use the Salon2s in our listening lab.

Finally, John noted in his measurements (Figs. 3 and 9) that the level of harmonics was “higher than usual.” We also have observed that in our tests when using 0dBFS signals with the line outputs set to Fixed, which yields 5.2V RMS. Although the harmonic distortion would be lower if the output level were instead 3.5–4V RMS, we made the conscious decision to add a bit more gain to instead increase the signal/noise ratio of the preamp's input stage. Because many recordings don't even have peak levels of 0dBFS, and since no one listens to 0dBFS sinewaves in their living rooms, we felt that offering listeners a few dB lower noise was a worthwhile trade-off.

The No.585 is the culmination of a lot of hard work and dedication by the Harman Luxury Audio Group's electronics engineering team. Our goal was to pack as many features and as much performance into a single box as we possibly could. We wanted to build something attractive and substantial that would work flawlessly for years to come. Finally, we also believe that our products absolutely must have outstanding measured performance and exemplary sound quality—the pure, effortless, three-dimensional sound that Mark Levinson is known for.

Being able to build products that bring musical enjoyment to people's lives is what we are passionate about. Knowing how thoroughly Larry enjoyed using the No.585, and having John confirm its excellent measurements, is extraordinarily gratifying.

—Todd Eichenbaum, Director of Engineering
Harman Luxury Audio Group

important, the midrange was more fleshed out with the Questyle QP1R, Beck's voice sounding better separated from the other instruments in the mix. The Questyle's top octave also seemed slightly more extended when I switched to the NightHawks.

Against the PonoPlayer

I reviewed the PonoPlayer (\$399) in April 2015.⁵ Sticking with the NightHawks in conventional single-ended mode, the double bass in Dave Brubeck's “Three to Get Ready,” from *Time Out* (DSD64 file, Columbia/Acoustic Sounds), had a touch more low-frequency weight through the Questyle than through the Pono, though the Pono reproduced the piano with more midrange body. The instrument sounded slightly more ethereal with the QP1R, though the hint of room acoustic around the stabbed piano chords just before the final statement of the theme was more developed with the Questyle. In “All or Nothing At All,” from Diana Krall's *Love Scenes* (DSD64 file, Verve/Acoustic Sounds), Krall's voice sounded a little more three-dimensional through the Pono, though again, the double bass with which she duets at the start of the track had a bit more low-frequency weight through the Questyle.

With Beck's “Heart Is a Drum,” the Pono sounded too thick in the upper bass, the Questyle doing a slightly better job of delineating the individual elements in this complex mix. This was with the AudioQuest NightHawk headphones; the more open-sounding Audeze LCD-Xes worked better with the PonoPlayer, though the Questyle still had greater low-frequency weight with these headphones.

Conclusion

I enjoyed my time with the Questyle QP1R, though I never got entirely comfortable controlling the player with its scroll wheel. And with the slightly-less-than-optimal performance at the top and bottom of its dynamic-range envelope (see “Measurements”), users should make sure they use the gain setting most appropriate for their specific headphones. But the QP1R is beautiful in appearance, and equally beautiful in sound quality with both hi-res PCM and DSD files—I can confidently recommend it. And unlike the PonoPlayer, it *does* fit in my shirt pocket. Just. ■

⁵ See www.stereophile.com/content/pono-ponoplayer-portable-music-player.

DEALERS' SHOWCASE

ADVERTISING



VooDoo CABLE™

THE ART OF HIGH RESOLUTION AUDIO

2015
the absolute sound
Editors' Choice Awards

*"Balanced and immersive big-buck performance for half the price of the Big Boys."
- Neil Gader, TAS #245*

**AVAILABLE AT
THE CABLE COMPANY
800.328.9973
Cable@TheCableCo.Com**

THE CABLE COMPANY



USED CABLE.COM
UsedCable.com
USED CABLE.COM
USED CABLE.COM
Usedcable.com
UsedCable.com

The BEST way to buy used cables.

We buy cables. We sell cables. Free good advice.
One year warranty – 30 day exchange.

THE CABLE COMPANY

usedcable@usedcable.com | 800.328.9973
"A Cable Company Joint"

MANUFACTURERS' SHOWCASE

ADVERTISING



THE #1

MOST PROFOUND improvement
you may ever hear from your turntable.

2012
S
stereophile
Product of the Year

215-862-6570
ultra@UltraSystem.com

ULTRA SYSTEMS



myowncover
upload - design - order

stereophile
YOUR PHOTO HERE

Looking for a personalized gift for almost any occasion?
My Own Cover magazine covers are perfect for birthday gifts, holiday gifts, corporate recognitions, or celebrating a milestone. Each magazine cover is as unique as the person on the cover.



- Upload your own photos
- Design great personalized covers
- Order prints to share or give as gifts

Create your own magazine cover and be a star.
www.myowncover.com

Please visit our showroom in Orange County, CA for an audition



JoLida B&K James
REL Tara Labs Sunfire
MIT Richard Gray's

www.DMC-ELECTRONICS.com (714)728-8645 **Best Prices!**

AUDIO ART, est. 1976 – Edge-of-the-art audio components dedicated to serving music. Aesthetix, Audience, Avalon, Ayre, Benz, Cardas, Clearaudio, Hegel, Jeff Rowland, Martin Logan, Music Hall, Pro-Ject Series, Rega, Shunyata, SME, Sonus Faber, Spondor, Vandersteen. (804) 558-5300, AudioArtUSA@aol.com, Richmond, VA.

**LOOKS WEIRD
FIXES WARPED RECORDS**



www.vinylflat.com
469-426-8554

AUDIOCLASSICS.COM – Buys / Sells / Trades / Repairs - Appraises New, Used & Vintage McIntosh, Marantz, Tannoy, JBL, Levinson and other High End audio equipment. **3501 Vestal Road, Vestal, NY 13850 (800) 321-2834**

SALT LAKE CITY AREA – Aesthetix, AMG, Audio Research, Clearaudio, Dynavector, EAT, Esoteric, Exposure, Harbeth, Kimber, Marantz, Ortofon, Plinius, Primare, REL, Rogue, Shunyata, Vienna Acoustics, VPI, and more! (801) 647-8583 or visit www.arisaudio.com

LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK – Audience, Audio Physic, Audio Desk, Audioquest, Avalon Acoustics, Berkeley Audio Design, Bryston, Cardas, Conrad-Johnson, Dali, Esoteric, Jeff Rowland, Hegel, Lyra, Martin-Logan, Oppo, Oracle Audio, Ortofon, Purist Audio Design, Plinius, Siltech, SME, Stax, Symposium Acoustics, Tannoy Prestige, Totem, VPI, Wireworld and many more. Large selection of fine preowned gear, quality trades welcome, analog guru on board. **New York Sound & Vision (631) 321-8969** or visit www.newyorksoundandvision.com



STEREOPHILE ADVERTISER INDEX

Acoustic Sounds	16-17, 54
Apogee	63
Astell&Kern	104
Audeze	65, 67
Audience	8
Audio Advisor	52, 70-71
Audio Plus Services	C4
AudioVision SF/	
Chord Electronics	42
Audioengine	132
AudioQuest	117, 155, 165
Aurender	18
AXPONA	154
Axiss Distribution	56
Ayre Acoustics	76
Bel Canto	12
Bluesound	90
Bricasti Design	168
Brinkmann USA	162
Brooks Berdan LTD	84
Bowers & Wilkins	60
Cable Company	36-37, 174
California Audio Technology	4

Channel D	168
Classé Audio	58
Consumer Electronics Assn	160
Crystal Cable	40
David Lewis Audio	170
dCS	118
Devialet	C2
Dynaudio	102
Elite Audio Video Distribution	146
Elusive Disc	28-29, 158
Emotiva Audio	92
Fidelis Audio	103
Furutech	146
Get Better Sound	142
Golden Ear Technology	46, 48
GTT AV	50-51
HDtracks	148
Hegel	96
Innovative Audio	120
JL Audio	10, 11
Joseph Audio	167
KEF	110
Kevro Monitor Audio	69
Kimber Kable	32
Legacy Audio	44
Lincoln	6-7

MartinLogan	128
MBL North America, Inc.	115
Morrow Audio	75
MSB Technology	113
Music Direct	20-21, 112, 164
Music Lovers Audio Video	140
Musical Surroundings	72, 100
Needle Doctor	23, 78-79, 80-81, 134, 144, 156-157
On A Higher Note	122
Oppo Digital	136
Ortofon	153, 169
Overture	107
Paradigm	30
Paragon Sight & Sound	164
Parts Express	170
Pass Laboratories	94
Phase Technology	150
PrimaLuna	26
Radial Engineering	14-15
Revel	138
Rogers High Fidelity	98
Rogue Audio	41
Rotel	88
Shunyata Research	86
Siltech	C3

Sonos Faber	24
SOTM	126
Source Systems	130
Spondor Audio	38
Stillpoints	166
Synergistic Research	114
Take 5 Audio	166
Ultra Systems	174
Upscale Audio	34
usedcable.com	174
VAC	108
Vandersteen Audio	130
VooDoo Cable	174
VPI Industries	116
Weinhart Design	162
Wireworld	152
YG Acoustics	124

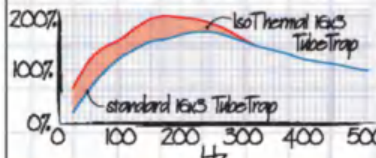
THE AD INDEX IS PROVIDED AS A COURTESY. THE PUBLISHER IS NOT LIABLE FOR INCORRECT INFORMATION OR EXCLUDED LISTINGS. ADVERTISERS SHOULD CONTACT THEIR SALES REPRESENTATIVE TO CORRECT OR UPDATE A LISTING.

ASC Acoustic Sciences Corporation **IsoThermal TubeTrap** (patent pending)



ASC-IsoThermal TubeTrap

We're introducing our new IsoThermal TubeTrap, designed for the enhanced deep bass absorption required to minimize the phase add/cancel effects of the rear wall bounce.



www.acousticssciences.com
1-800-272-8823

david michael audio



Representing The Worlds Finest Audio Products

Accuphase, Aesthetix, Air Tight, Aurender, Bel Canto, Bricasti, Constellation, Devialet, Focal, Harbeth, Hegel, JL Audio, Joseph Audio, Luxman, Magico, MIT, MSB, Naim, Nordost, Ortofon, Phasemation, Raidho, Rega, Rockport, Shelter, Shunyata, Soulution, Soundsmith, Stillpoints, VAC, Vienna, Vivid, VPI

586.244.8479
info@davidmichaelsaudio.com
www.davidmichaelsaudio.com

AUDIOPHILE ESSENTIALS

Audiophile Essentials Editor CD package includes Recommended Component Collector's Edition Editor's Choice CD - only \$15.



stereophile

shop.stereophile.com
YOUR AUDIO AUTHORITY

Akitika



You can build great sound with Preamp & Power Amp Kits by Akitika

Build the **PR-101** preamp. Add the features you want. Control the volume, balance, and select the source from the best seat in the house.

Build the **GT-101** power amplifier. Drive your speakers with 50 WPC from a fully regulated power supply for the best possible sound.

Start building your stereo system today. For more information, go to www.akitika.com

Akitika

audioquest.

Authorized Audioquest Dealer Since 1980

Current Audioquest product line available plus many specials such as:

- AC12 Power Cord originally \$257 now \$99
- Silver Extreme interconnects with Solid FPS silver originally \$400 now \$99.95 pair
- Coral/CQ interconnects now only \$99 pair
- GBC Deluxe Hyperlitz speaker cable now only \$139.95 pair
- Closeouts on Nordost flatline cables

We also carry Music Hall, Epos, Creek, Nitty Gritty and more!

HCM Audio

Secure online ordering
530-891-8326
www.HCMaudio.com

We Have Solutions



Rhythm Platforms
Vibration Management On Display

Allentown, PA

BEK HiFi

Klaudio • Hegel • darTZeel • Rogue Harbeth • Evolution Acoustics Wharfedale • Sonus Faber • Avid Well Tempered • Master & Dynamic Star Sound Tech and many more...

610-351-0764
www.BEKhifi.com

Sound Anchor Hi-Performance Monitor Stands



Custom Sized
Single Post, 3 Post, 4 Post
Adjustable and Motorized
Models

www.soundanchors.com
321 724 1237



Auditorium 23 Cinema Hommage Loudspeaker

DON BETTER AUDIO

Exclusive Mid-West Dealer for:
Auditorium 23, Acoustic Plan, EMT, Shindo,
Leben, Line Magnetic, Lignolab,
Well Tempered Labs, and much more.

Phone: (216) 375-1393
Email: info@donbetteraudio.com
www.DonBetterAudio.com

audio revelation MUSICAL TRUTH



**Tannoy Revolution XT
Yes! We have them!**

Audio Desk • Aurender • Berkeley • Bricasti • Bryston
Constellation • Devialet • Dynavector • EAT • KEF • Kiseki
Lumin • Lyra • Magico • NuPrime • Origin Live • Ortofon
Plinius • Primare • Proac • Reed • Sota • Sutherland • Tannoy
VAC • VPI • Well Tempered • Whist • Zesto and more!

760.434.2625 (S. CA)
AudioRevelation.com | jay@audiorevelation.com

*Hear the new
Hana line
of cartridges
from Japan*



**MOCKINGBIRD
DISTRIBUTION**

214.668.2509
MockingbirdDistribution.com



"Upgrade Your Musical Experience"

Harbeth, Acoustic Signature, VAC, LFD,
Penaudio, Primare, VTL, Unison,
Wilson Audio, Naim, Sutherland,
Dan D'Agostino, Stein Music,
Tellurium Q, Rega, Shunyata, CH Precision,
Stenheim, BAT, Opera Loudspeakers,
Bricasti, Palmer, Metronome, Pass Labs,
REL Acoustics, JL Audio, Stirling

Trade Ins • Consignment • In Home Consultations

fidelis 
MUSIC FOR LIFE

www.fidelisav.com • info@fidelisav.com
603-880-HIFI (4434)

High End Performance,
Real World Prices.

audio Artcable
CONNECTING YOU WITH THE MUSIC



Recommended Component
STEREOPHILE 2014
Writer's Choice Award
POSITIVE FEEDBACK ONLINE
Exceptional Value Award
TONE AUDIO
Editor's Choice Award
STEREOTIMES.COM

www.audioartcable.com
619-255-6451

AURAL BY ROBERT BAIRD ROBERT

Can you show me a dream
Can you show me one that's better than mine
Can you stand it in the cold light of day
Neither can I
FROM "GLAD AND SORRY" (RONNIE LANE)

Had Me A Real Good Time

“As you know, when we played live, anything could happen. We were out of our tree mostly. As Rod says, ‘a drinkin’ and a shaggin’.”

And yet the Faces, the band beloved for its sloppy, uproarious 1970s live shows, actually managed to also cut four studio records during their brief time together. All four—*First Step* (1970), *Long Player* (1971), *A Nod Is as Good as a Wink . . . to a Blind Horse* (1971), and *Ooh La La* (1973)—have now, on the 40th anniversary of the band's dissolution, been remastered, and reissued on CD and LP, with a disc of B sides and rarities as *1970-1975: You Can Make Me Dance, Sing Or Anything*. Back in their '70s heyday, when Kenney Jones, Ronnie Lane, and Ian McLagan, the three-fourths of the Small Faces remaining after Steve Marriott had left to found Humble Pie, were joined by Ronnie Wood and Rod Stewart, fresh from playing with the Jeff Beck Group, it was a far-fetched idea—particularly to anyone who saw them in concert—that this band of charming ruffians could ever be that interested in making good records.

“It was two very different things,” Kenney Jones said of the recording studio and the concert stage in a recent interview from the Hurtwood Polo Club in Surrey, where he serves as chairman. “We were a lot younger, all of us, and we were still enjoying life, still discovering what we were doing—we didn’t know what was ‘round the next corner. Live, we just loved the participation with the audience that we had. Every night, even in a stadium, it was like a party. Recording, we were in a contrived atmosphere where we had to achieve something—kind of stiffer, in a sense, more tame. We enjoyed it, but always, the party atmosphere was missing.”

What saved the band, at least in the studio, was the presence on the last two records, *A Nod . . .* and *Ooh La La* (with its gimmicky cover featuring Ettore Petrolini) of Glyn Johns, who engineered and, with the band, coproduced the albums. Asked about the sound of the new remasterings by Bill Inglot, Rick Conrad, Steve Woolard and Dan Hersch, Jones audibly shrugged.

“I liked the sound that we had. Now, there’s a bit more modern sound they’ve given it that I’m not sure about. Sometimes the drums don’t have sustain like we had before. Glyn Johns never got me a bad drum sound in my life. And I don’t see any reason to mess with it. Not on everything, but I also noticed they added a little bit more bass and a little bit more mid. It gives you a bit more body, I suppose, but then I didn’t see anything wrong in the first place. It’s like any new technology—you can do anything, but if you weren’t there at the time, you could quite easily muck it up a bit.



“I would have loved to have gone and remixed a few things. I’d still like to do an album, put something together, a best-of maybe, and go in the studio with Glyn and remix things, just have a bit of fun. I’d love to do that with [the Small Faces’] *Ogden’s Nut Gone Flake* [1968], but we haven’t got the multitracks, they’ve gone missing.”

Despite Johns’s presence and the fact that the songwriting, particularly from Lane, got more interesting, as

the band’s career went on from 1969 to 1975, the records did not sell well.

“No, it’s strange. We didn’t write commercial songs; that’s the difference. A couple of things in there came near [to being hits], but we were making album tracks. That’s why some of the songs are not really that catchy. We didn’t write any purposely for any particular market, just for us.”

Now that the Faces’ catalog has been refurbished, what about those rumors of vaults full of professionally recorded live shows still awaiting release?

“We decided we should record some key gigs that we did, and some of them are great, but we never did anything with them. They’re magic. Record labels just want to mess with the tapes they’ve got. A remix or remaster is more commercial. It’s all done properly, professional, whereas the live stuff needs a whole new approach to it. [The problem is] making time to actually listen, and cherry-pick some of the takes from, say, some of the gigs we did in Chicago, mixed with things we did in L.A. and San Francisco. To get through that lot would take you forever, but one day we will do it, because it’s the only thing we’ve got left to do. Apart from doing a studio album, which I’d dearly love to do.”

Is there material?

“Yeah, there are some ideas around. It’s just a matter of gettin’ together and knockin’ them into shape.”

Something that the band has already done is play live together again: in September 2015, at Hurtwood, at a charity gig to aid research into prostate cancer. Ronnie Lane died of multiple sclerosis in 1997, and Ian McLagan passed suddenly from a stroke in 2014; so Jones, Wood, and Stewart were backed by a band that included horns and background singers—a total of nine additional members.

“While we had a great time, it was very apparent to myself, Ronnie, and Rod that we were missing two incredible people. Rod said Mac and Ronnie Lane were with us in spirit. And we certainly felt their presence. Rod sent me an e-mail the next day and said, ‘We don’t need all these other people.’ I said, ‘You’re quite right. I couldn’t agree more.’

“We’re a people’s band. We’re a *bloke’s* band.” ■

Music critic Robert Baird (RBaird@entusiastnetwork.com) welcomes a vibrant discourse on music and musicians.

The hard reality is that audio cables can only do damage: they can blur or smear information, distort phase relationships, destroy detail and add colouration. Bad cables can – and all too often do – ruin the best of systems.

To make the best cables, the ones that do the least damage, takes years of experience and accumulated knowledge, the development of new techniques and proprietary technology – and a willingness still to learn...

In performance terms, that's when evolution sparks revolution.



Siltech - years of excellence are no accident.

www.siltechcables.com

Distributed in the USA by Audio Plus Services 800.663.9352 www.audioplusservices.com
Distributed in Canada by Plurison 866.271.5689 www.plurison.com



Not just for your man cave!

A complete wireless music system, commanding 450 watts of power through six custom-designed speakers.



Release your music.

It's not just for your man cave any more.

Put it in your **kitchen**.

Your **bedroom**.

Your **office**.

And with the resolution that you demand.

Like our incredible Bentley Automotive system, the mu-so will bring elegance and quality to enhance any living space in your home.



naimaudio.com/mu-so

naimaudio.com/find-a-retailer